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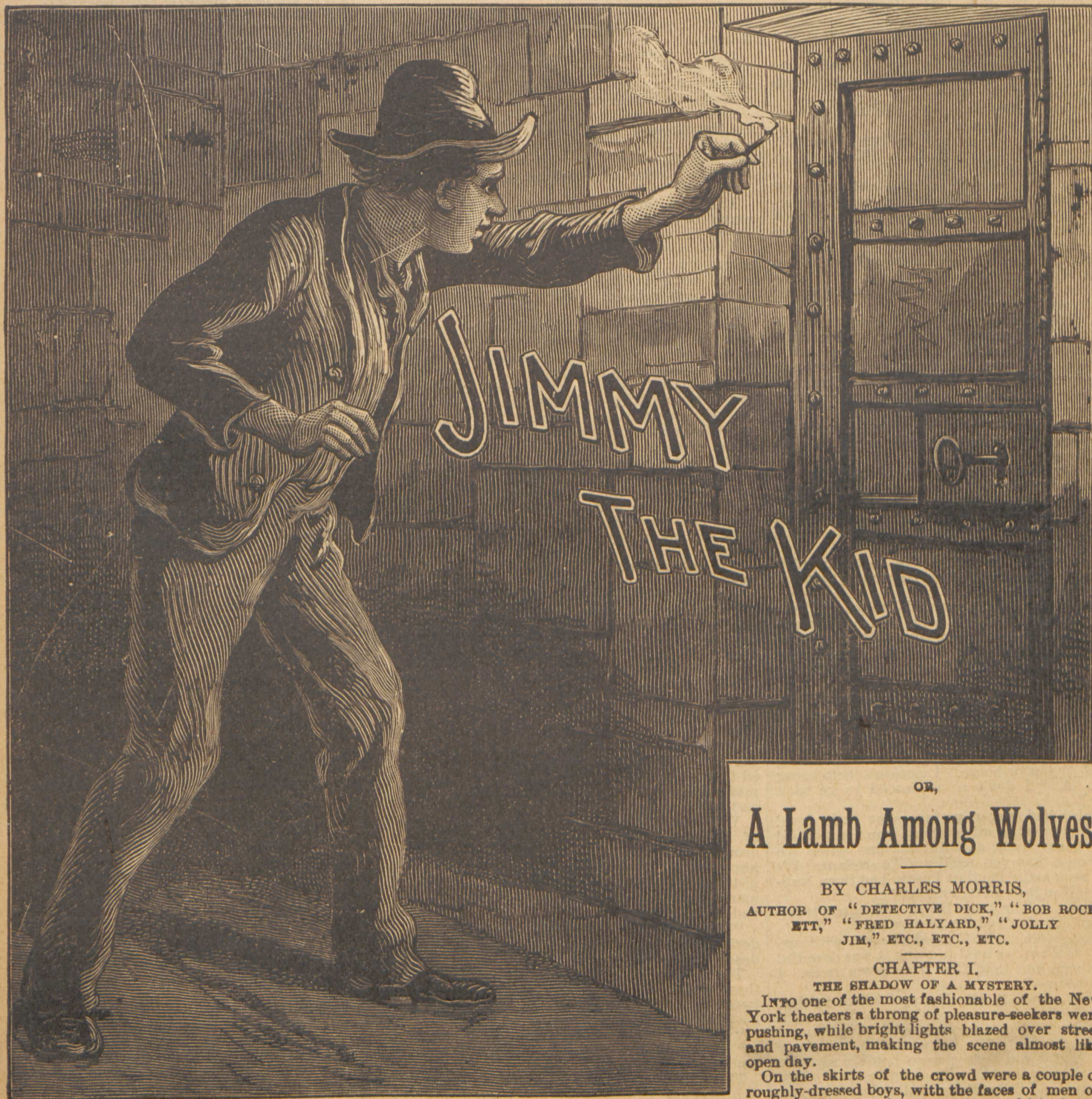
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A NARROW IRON DOOR WAS VISIBLE IN ONE SIDE OF THE TRIANGULAR WALL, WITH THE KEY STILL IN ITS LOCK.

OR,

A Lamb Among Wolves.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "DETECTIVE DICK," "BOB ROCK-
ETT," "FRED HALYARD," "JOLLY
JIM," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE SHADOW OF A MYSTERY.

INTO one of the most fashionable of the New York theaters a throng of pleasure-seekers were pushing, while bright lights blazed over street and pavement, making the scene almost like open day.

On the skirts of the crowd were a couple of roughly-dressed boys, with the faces of men on their shoulders, and features from which the innocence of youth had long since fled, while their

whole expression was that coming from experience of the worst side of life.

They were just now engaged in watching a third lad, a boy several years younger than themselves, and of very different appearance. He was far better looking, and would, if well-dressed, have been considered a handsome youth, while his face had an innocent, confiding expression very different from the hardened looks of the others.

He was dressed very poorly, while there was that about him that spoke of one new to the city, and scared at the noise and bustle of the streets. He stood looking wistfully at the crowd, as if he wished for something for which he was afraid to ask, while his face had the pinched look of one who was suffering from hunger.

"Did yer ever twig anything quite so green?" said one of the boys, nudging the other. "Why, the coon looks as if he might ha' growed on an apple tree, and been shook off afore he was half ripe."

"I should rayther guess so," answered the other. "His hair looks as if it was cut in a pasture-field. Never see'd anything quite so countrified."

"Old Grimes oughter have him. He's jist the sort o' cub to be licked inter shape. The old crook thinks it jolly fun ter get hold o' kids as don't know nothin'."

"Let's go fur him, Joel! Maybe he'll make meat fur our gridiron."

"All right, Billy; sail ahead. I'm arter you, like a tail arter a kite."

The speakers approached and accosted the young stranger, who started with surprise on finding himself spoken to.

"It's kinder lively round yere, Tommy Green, ain't it?" queried Joe.

"That ain't my name," answered the boy, innocently. "My name's Jimmy Snipe. Anyhow, that's what they called me."

"Who called you? Yer daddy and mammy?"

"I ain't got no daddy nor mammy," answered the boy, his eyes growing moist, "don't seem to ever had any. That's what they called me where I came from afore I come here."

"Why, in course it ain't Tommy Green! You might 'a' seed that," broke in Billy. "This is a different chap altogether. Reckon you ain't lost round yere, Jimmy?"

"I don't know nobody, and I never was in the city afore," answered the boy. "The noise and the crowd I can't get used to."

"Bless yer eyes, youngster, you'll soon git broke inter that. Don't be afeard. But don't yer know nary a feller in New York, and ain't yer got no home?"

"None except—that place. And I won't go back there, except they take me back with ropes around me."

The city boys winked at one another.

"Did yer ever see anything so jolly verdant?" whispered Joe. "He's a reg'lar gooseberry."

"And we oughter be killed if we don't snatch him off the bush. Square yerself, Joe. This is your opportunity."

"That place?" remarked Joe, to the country lad, with an air of surprise and sympathy.

"What place?"

"The poor-house," answered Jimmy. "That's where I've lived as long back as I can remember. I seem to have been born and brought up there. I might have lived and died there if they hadn't used me so bad I couldn't stand it, and had to run away."

"Lawsee!" cried Joe. "Them's tellin's. Bless my eyes, if I'd 'a' thought it. And it's them as called you Jimmy Snipe?"

"Yes. I've always been called that, I guess. I hope you won't think bad of me for coming out of the poor-house. I couldn't help being there. And I don't never intend to go back again."

"Think bad on yer, ye innercent little dove! Why, that's where all our great men come from! Ther's more lords and dukes come outer the poor-house than you could shake a stick at. It's allers been ag'in' me that I never had them 'vantages. Nor Billy here, neither."

"That's so," broke in Billy. "I wasn't treated fair. You've had the best on us."

"You don't say so!" cried Jimmy, with surprise. "Why, we used to think it was dreadful to be there, and that folks'd be down on us. I didn't know—"

"Why, shoot it all, Jimmy!" broke in Joe, "there ain't no better set-out in life. You've got jist as much chance ter be President as General Washington had when he weren't no older nor you. And if you ain't got no home, and don't know nobody in the city, what's that? You know me, and Billy Blake, and we're scrougers, now you bet."

"And if you'll j'ine in with us, we'll find you a home where you'll be took good care of, and put in the way ter make a man of ye," added Billy.

A look of gratitude came into Jimmy's eyes as he looked from one to the other of his new friends.

"You don't mean it?" he gasped. "A little poor-house waif like me, that's half-starved, and don't know how to do anything?"

"We'll teach you how, don't you be afeard of that; and we'll fill you up so's you'll never think of bein' starved ag'in."

The gratitude of the innocent lad at this was beyond expression. He grasped the hands of his new friends, and with tears in his eyes, thanked them, and promised to work his finger-ends off, if they'd only show him what to do.

While this conversation was going on, the crowd at the theater door was increasing. It was the hour for the curtain to rise, and late-comers were hurrying to get their seats.

Not far from the boys stood a pavement ticket speculator, who kept yelling out as he swung in the air a handful of tickets:

"Here you are for reserved seats! Step this way. They're all sold out at the box-office. Here you are. Have a ticket? Reserved seats."

"Have you got any orchestra chairs?" asked a gentleman, stopping.

"Yes, sir; yes, sir; here they are. How many? Two?" He eagerly shuffled over his tickets.

"No, no; one is all I need."

The gentleman, who seemed of middle age, pulled out his pocketbook and held it in his hand while he waited for the ticket.

At that moment, a rush of people who came suddenly 'round a neighboring corner, separated the boys, and pushed Jimmy close upon the speculator and his customer. For an instant they were all crowded into a mass together.

Then the throng separated. Jimmy looked round for his companions, but failed to see them. They seemed to have disappeared.

At the same instant there came an excited outcry from the old gentleman.

"Stop thief! Stop thief!" he shouted loudly. "I've been robbed! Where's the policeman? Stop thief!"

He was wildly gesticulating, while his face was red with anger and excitement. The pocketbook which he had grasped a minute before was gone from his hand!

"It was this boy! I saw him!" cried the speculator, pointing to Jimmy, who stood looking on in amazement, unable to tell just what had happened.

As he stood there, pale and shrinking, he looked like a culprit, and the gentleman turned upon him with a furious countenance.

"This boy? This street rat?" he ejaculated, grasping Jimmy with a fierce grip, while his face blazed with rage. "The young vagabond! He's got my money, has he? Where's a policeman?"

"I haven't got it!" protested the boy. "I never touched your money! I ain't no thief! I never stole any thing in my life!"

"You lie, you young pickpocket! I've got you, and you won't get away. Let me have a look at your face, you hardened young vagabond!"

He twisted Jimmy fiercely round, and fixed a pair of stern and angry eyes upon his countenance; while the boy continued to earnestly declare that he had not touched the money, and to plead for release.

It was a dark and pitiless expression which the captor fixed on the frightened and bewildered face of his prisoner. It was the look of a man who would hunt to the death any one who had fallen under his anger.

Yet what was the surprise of the captive, and of the people who had gathered anxiously around, to see the gentleman suddenly release him, and fall back as if he had been struck by a pistol shot, while his flushed face grew pale as marble, and a look came into his eyes as if he had seen a ghost.

"That face!" he cried, in frightened and shuddering accents. "Has the grave given up its dead? Is it a specter I see?"

The lookers on listened in astonishment to these words, and noted the strange contrast between the innocent-faced and shrinking lad and his pallid and shivering accuser.

"I never touched it!" muttered the bewildered boy. "It was somebody else. I never touched your money."

The gentleman retreated a step, raising a hand to his eyes as if to shut out out some frightful vision.

"Who are you, boy? Where have you come from? Answer me," he asked in trembling tones.

At this instant a familiar voice sounded in the lad's ears.

"Cheese it, Jimmy! Cheese it, you beggar!"

Innocent as the lad was he guessed at the meaning of this slang, and, in an instant, the desire for safety drove every other feeling out of his mind. In his fright he fancied that some terrible consequences might come from the accusation of theft, and with a quick and agile movement he turned and darted into the throng.

Some hands were extended to stop him, but he glided through them like an eel, and shot into the outer circle of the crowd.

Ere the gentleman had recovered from his strange surprise, or any one else could prevent, the youthful fugitive had vanished from sight, in the circle of darkness which lay beyond the glare of the theater lights.

He found his two late companions waiting for him. With surprised looks they seized him by the arms, and hurried him away, until they were beyond all danger of pursuit.

Then they stopped, twisted him round, and looked with meaning glances in his face.

"Well, I swow!" ejaculated one.

"I'll be eternally fiddled!" cried the other.

"As sure as my name's Joe the Joker I'd never 'a' thought it."

"And him playin' the innocent baby on us!"

"Where is it anyhow?" demanded Joe. "Let's twig it."

"Where's what?" demanded Jimmy, in bewilderment.

"The swag as you hooked from that broad-cloth bu'ster."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Why, can't you talk English, Joe?" asked Billy. "The pocketbook you snatched? Where is it, my jolly?"

"The pocketbook? I never touched his pocketbook. You don't think I'm a thief, like he did?"

"Then what did you stir up that blunderbuss of a row about? Oh, come; that won't go down. Fork it out!"

"Let's go through him," suggested Billy.

In a trice the boy's pockets were searched, but without result. No trace of the pocketbook was there.

"I told you I wasn't a thief," declared Jimmy earnestly. "I never stole a cent in my life, and never will. When I can't live except on stolen money I'll drown myself."

"Well, here's a lark!" cried Joe, winking to his companion. "That's right, Jimmy! We thought you took the old gentleman's money, and wanted to take it back to him. And we're mighty glad to find that you're honest to the backbone. We couldn't have kept company with you if you'd done anything wrong, you know."

"Won't Mr. Grimes be glad to find we've brung him sich a little Sunday-schooler!" added Billy. "Let's go home and interduce Jimmy to some supper. I reckon he's hungry."

Jimmy went confidently along with his new companions, rather proud of their praise of his honesty. The innocent lamb did not dream into what wolves' claws he had fallen. Danger lay ahead, where to his young eyes all seemed bright and promising.

But, what did the strange scene at the theater mean? The surprise and fright of the gentleman at sight of the face of the almshouse waif was something that needed explanation. What secret lay hidden under that young life? What strange mystery enveloped the boy's origin? That, only time and circumstances could reveal.

CHAPTER II.

THE KID IN A QUEER FOLD.

In a long, low room, of a house in one of the "hard" localities of the great city of New York, were four persons. It was a dingy and begrimed apartment, scantily supplied with old and dilapidated furniture, picked up apparently from the lowest class of the second-hand stores of the city.

Of the four persons present we are already acquainted with three, they being the boys whose adventure we described in the last chapter.

One of the two friends of the almshouse waif, Joe, the Joker, as he was called by his associates, was a strongly-built youth, of almost the age of a man, with a sinister countenance, on which, however, was an affectation of good-humor.

His companion, William Blake, or Billy, as he was generally entitled, was a short, round-

bodied boy, with a full, red face, in which the eyes seemed stuck like raisins in a pudding. There was something comical about his whole aspect, and his manner of breaking into a squeaking laugh at the least approach of fun made him, in some degree, the butt of his comrades.

The fourth member of the party was a personage none too favorably known to the police of New York. He was a tall and bony individual, with a stoop in his shoulders and a bend in his knees that took several inches from his height, and quite spoiled the fit of his threadbare attire. His crooked fingers reminded one of the claws of a hawk, while his sallow face, with a nose like a vulture's beak, and little, twinkling eyes, added neither beauty nor attractiveness to his aspect.

On this ill-favored face was a perpetual smirk, as of unceasing good humor and benevolence, and a cunning look that gave good warrant for his appellation of Foxy Grimes, by which he had been so long known that his real name was quite forgotten.

The old crook was stroking the curly hair of the Kid, as Jimmy had already been named by his new associates. The innocent-minded lad shrunk involuntarily from his touch, which affected him very unpleasantly, in spite of the seeming benevolence of the smirking face.

"It was too bad," declared old Foxy, with a look of pious indignation. "To want to take you to jail for stealing a pocketbook which you never touched! It was too bad."

"I never thought of taking it," declared Jimmy earnestly. "I never stole anything in my life, and never will."

"That's right, my boy, that's right," declared the old man, still stroking the boy's hair. "I'm glad to hear you talk like that. Honesty's the best policy, Jimmy. Never forget that, my son."

"I won't, thank you, Mr. Grimes."

"Stay with me, and I'll make a man of you, my lad; an honest man, which the good book says is the noblest work of God. If you follow my lessons you'll grow up to be an honor to the community, and maybe, in time, you might get to be a Sunday school superintendent."

"I'll try, Mr. Grimes," answered Jimmy earnestly.

During this conversation, the two other boys, who sat behind the speakers, seemed strangely affected.

The Joker was on his feet, dancing in a noiseless way, and at times stopping and going through motions as if he was delivering a sermon; while Billy's fat body was rolling on his chair, and he was pushing his handkerchief into his mouth until he seemed ready to suffocate.

"There's nothing like virtue and honesty in this world, my dear little lad. Look at me, my dear; it is that which has made the high-toned, respectable gentleman you see me. I can't do much with those two bad boys behind you, Jimmy, but I'm going to try and make you a copy of myself."

He was interrupted by a loud noise, as if something had fallen. On looking round it proved to be Billy Blake, who had tumbled from his rickety chair and was rolling on the floor, still pressing the handkerchief with both hands into his mouth.

"Hello!" cried Foxy, "what's the matter there? Skylarking again, are ye?"

"Git up, you cub!" cried Joe, kicking his doubled-up companion. "Don't be lettin' on ag'in that you're in a fit."

The kick sufficed to knock the handkerchief out of the boy's mouth, and instantly a burst of pent-up laughter came out, that filled the room with its squeaking sound.

"What's the matter with you? You ain't sick?" asked Foxy, with a show of concern.

"It's the histericks; he's always gittin' them, you know," explained the Joker.

Billy continued to roll and laugh, quite unable to control himself, while Jimmy looked on with a bewildered countenance. He was not able to make Old Grimes's protestations agree with certain ideas which had come into his young head, and he had some suspicion of the cause of Billy's sudden attack of hysterics.

The scene was brought to an end by the sound of a growling voice outside, and the opening of the door as if it had been burst open by a blow.

"What the blazes ails the idiots?" roared a man who appeared on the threshold. "They're wuss nor rank pizen. Blow you fur an old fool, Foxy, you've allers got a caboodle of howlin' young tarriers 'bout you."

The speaker was a powerfully-built man,

dressed in rusty gray pants, and a draggled knit jacket. His coarse, hard features were half hidden by a heavy black beard and mustache. His nose was flattened, as if it had been broken in some brawl, while a long scar ran across his cheek. There was just now a savage glare in his eyes, as he looked angrily upon the occupants of the room.

"Glad to see you, Plug," declared Old Grimes, with a grin. "I didn't know you were back from Saratoga. Never you mind the boys. Young blood ain't old blood, you know."

"Blast ther noisy picters, they're 'nough to bring the cops down on you. That chap on the floor wants chokin', blast him," and he flung himself in a chair with an energy that made it crack while he threw his hat angrily on the table.

"Blamed if I like goslin's," he growled.

"Who keers, Plug Peters?" demanded the Joker defiantly, setting his hat in a rakish fashion on his head. "Dunno as you're boss o' this shanty."

"Tain't you I mind, Joker," declared Plug, with an approving look. "You've got the makin' of a man in you. But I can't swaller that barrel of apple sass," pointing to the fat boy. "And—where the blazes did this milk-faced baby come from?"

"Hush, hush, Plug!" cried Foxy warningly. "Don't you be scaring little Jimmy. He's a nice little chap, and I'm going to show what education will do fer him."

"You are, eh? You'll make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, I reckon. Let's have a glint at the sonny." He grasped the frightened lad by the arm, and drew him before his knees, while his fierce eyes seemed to pierce the boy's face.

"Hello! Well, if this ain't a plant, I'll cave!"

The rough face of the speaker was full of astonishment, as he gave vent to this hasty exclamation. He released the lad, who drew back in affright.

"What's up?" demanded Foxy. "What wasp stung you?"

"Nothing," retorted Plug, as he picked up a pipe from the table. "Toothache, that's all. I've got an old snag here, that keeps jumpin'."

He lit the pipe and smoked furiously.

"That's the best cure for it. See here, Foxy, what do you keep them sports boxed up fur? Kick 'em into the street. I don't b'lieve in forcin' up youngsters."

Foxy looked at him meaningly.

"Just you go out and take a turn to settle your suppers, my lovelies," he said to the boys.

"And, mind you don't git into no mischief."

"That's the provender! Come, Jimmy!"

The boys made a rush for the street, the two elders dragging Jimmy, who seemed quite willing to go. But, once outside the door, the Joker looked at Billy, with his tongue in his cheek.

"That's a rum go," he whispered. "Plug's got suthin' in his cake-basket."

"You bet," was Billy's only answer.

The two men left behind gazed at one another.

"What stung you?" asked Foxy eagerly.

"What is there about the boy?"

"Shoot me if I kin tell. Somethin' durned queer. Where did you git the goslin'?"

"The boys picked him up in the street, and brung him here. He was drifting loose, and I took pity on the little fellow."

"You did, did you? Then all I've got to say is, it'd be better for the youngster if the devil had snatched him afore Foxy Grimes got his clutches on him. But who is the boy? What's his name? Where did he come from?"

"He ran away from the almshouse, and he says his name is Jimmy Snipe. That's a poor-house name, I fancy. What's up, Plug? Do you know the kid?"

"I've twigged jist sech a face somewhere afore. Got to think it out. I know ther's somethin' queer about it, somehow."

He leaned back reflectively in his chair, and blew the smoke of his pipe in clouds through the room.

For five minutes Plug continued to smoke, without another word, while the Old Fox sat with his hands round his knees, and his face bent eagerly forward, as if devoured with curiosity.

"Hang it all, it's like that smoke. It keeps floatin' afore me, but it won't take on no shape. I kin see that boy's face somewhere in the air of my old life, but," and Plug slapped his knee savagely, "hang me if I kin get hold of the thing."

"Something crooked in it, is there?" demanded Foxy.

"Dunno but there is. There's money in it, as

sure as you live. Guv me time, Foxy, and it'll come back. I'll hit the boy's trail."

"It might be well to ask some questions at the almshouse," suggested Foxy. "They may have a record of where the lad came from. If there's money in it, it's worth spending some money to get it out."

"Time 'nough fur that," declared Plug. "Wait till I've run the thing through my brain-pan. Let me alone. I'll hit the trail yet o' yer almshouse waif."

"If you don't, I will," muttered Foxy.

"Ain't no use palaverin' any longer 'bout it. What have you got in pickle for the youngster, that's the question? What are you goin' to make o' him?"

"I'll have to do like you, Plug; run the thing through my brain-pan. If there's money in the boy, it might pay to play the innocent dodge. Whoever he belongs to mightn't care to pay for spoiled goods."

"You can't help sp'ilin' everything you touch, Foxy," averred Plug, with a grim show of humor. "If I was a barrel of sound apples, I wouldn't want to git in your pantry. I'd be rotten to the bottom afore I was there a month. You'll fit the youngster for the penitentiary quicker than you will for the Sunday-school, that's my notion. But, I reckon, ther's been gab enough 'bout that bizness. Squat yerself down. I've got somethin' else fur yer private ear."

It is not necessary to repeat the conversation that followed. Suffice to say, it related to a matter concerning which we shall have much to relate in the sequel—namely, a house-breaking scheme which Plug Peters was devising.

The unsavory individual whom we have been obliged to introduce to our readers was a member of that class of the population of the metropolis who are heard from more often than they are seen. In short, he was a burglar by profession, and his familiar association with Foxy Grimes did not speak well for the honesty of the latter.

The scheme in view at present related to a gentleman's house at some little distance from the city, in which, as Peters had learned, a considerable sum of money was kept.

The two villains sat long debating over their illegal project, while Jimmy and his doubtful associates remained in the street.

The conversation ended at length in Plug's rising and jamming his hat down well over his brows.

"I'll see if ther's anything in the lay," he said. "Dick Diver's on it with me, and I'm goin' to put him on the scout." He turned back on reaching the door. "Ther's somethin' mighty queer 'bout that kid," he remarked, reflectively. "I can't get it out o' my noddle. I know his phiz like I know dog-pie. He ain't no common poor-house pick-up, nary time. Blast my thick skull, it's in thar, somewhere."

He struck his clinched fist violently against his forehead, as if he hoped to hammer out the mystery.

"If we could only nail that theater cove, we might get at it," suggested Foxy. "The Joker says he tumbled back and turned milk-white when he spied the boy's face. He knowed him, Plug, and he didn't feel nowise pretty about it. Depend on it, the boy is of good blood, and has been used foul. There's money in this."

The old rascal's face had an avaricious look as he bent forward and dropped his voice to a whisper. His claw-like fingers were curved as if to clutch the cash which he saw in his miserly fancy.

Plug took the pipe from his lips, and looked up with sour disdain on the eager face before him.

"You thunderin' old screw!" he growled. "I b'lieve you'd sell yer dried-up soul fur a gold-dollar, and think you'd made by the bargain. You make me sick, Foxy Grimes. Faugh! I must get a breath o' outside air to freshen me up."

He stalked heavily from the room, leaving Foxy with a look of fury on his ugly old countenance. At that moment he could have hung Plug Peters even at the risk of his own life.

CHAPTER III.

DANGER!

A MONTH has passed away since the date of our last chapter. Jimmy the Kid is still under the tutelage of Foxy Grimes and his pupils, but has failed to learn, as yet, what sort of a den he is in. No evidence of the old man's real business has appeared, and it seems to Jimmy that he has nothing to do in that locality except to eat, drink, and enjoy himself.

The old crook is very kind to him, and the

lad would be perfectly content but for an uneasy feeling that there is something concealed behind all this, and that the hidden mystery is not a safe one to deal with.

The two boys, Joe and Billy, though they have been schooled by the old man, have let out several hints that set Jimmy thinking. The lad is no fool, and it has more than once come into his head that he had better fly for his life from the mysterious peril that surrounds him.

Some things seen and heard have made him fancy that he is among law-breakers, that Old Grimes is a receiver of stolen goods, and that his two apprentices aid in the safe disposal of these goods, if they are not being trained up as thieves themselves.

But to fly from the danger surrounding him is easier to think of than to perform. He is constantly watched by three pairs of sharp eyes. When out of Foxy's presence, Billy and the Joker never for an instant lose sight of him. The old man has given them strict orders. Jimmy is too valuable a prize to lose.

The one strong repugnance of the innocent-minded youth is to Plug Peters. He is terribly in dread of that savage personage, and never sees him without a fit of fear and trembling, which is not allayed by the burglar's rough manners.

It is the frequent visits of Peters, indeed, which has done most to fill Jimmy's brain with doubt of his associates. And yet a savage threat of Plug to pluck his head off his shoulders if he should attempt to leave the happy home of Foxy Grimes, is what principally deters him from seeking safety in flight. He fancies that his enemy's eyes are everywhere, and that he would not hesitate to carry out his dreadful threat, if he should have occasion for it.

Such is the condition of affairs one month after the date of the opening of our story.

The two persons whom we last saw in Foxy Grimes's room are there again—Plug Peters and the old crook.

The boys are absent, having been sent out for exercise.

"Aren't you afraid to trust the little rat too much in the street?" queried Plug. "He mought guv the boys leg bail."

"He can't play that trick on the Joker," replied Foxy. "Joe would scare the wits out of him if he tried any such move."

"The Joker's no slouch," admitted Plug. "But I've changed my notion 'bout the boy. 'Tain't safe ter trust him. Ther's too much money in him ter take chances. He must be handled different."

"As how?" asked Foxy.

"By bein' took through some underhand work, so's he'll git a skeer of the perlice, and be 'feared of his life to go out o' sight of your shanty."

"'Tain't a bad idea, Plug," said Foxy, reflectively. "But how is it to be done, that's the question?"

"Leave that ter me. If I don't put the prison shakes on the Kid, it's queer. I'll tell you what's in my craw arter we've looked over this land-lubber's chart."

He had spread a paper on the table between them, a sort of diagram, as it seemed, of a house and grounds. It was drawn in black, but marked here and there with crosses in red ink, as if to indicate some important localities.

"It looks promising, Plug," remarked Foxy, "in a low, cautious tone. 'Here's a window half-covered with bushes. That wouldn't be no more to you than so much bark."

"I'm afeard ther'll be too much bark," growled Plug. "Bark's the deuce on these country lays. Why didn't the fool put the dog-house in the picter?"

"You ain't getting afeard of a dog, at your age, Plug Peters? Dogs is necessary evils. And I reckon an ounce of strychnine can be found, by way of physic."

"And whar's the safe?"

"This mark here, Dick says. Office room. No snoozers about; and chock-full of money."

Plug leaned back in his chair, and drew strongly on his pipe, while his eyes continued fixed on the diagram.

"I didn't think ther' was any sich consarned fools kickin'," he resumed; "to plant his house with yaller boys, when ther's banks a plenty. Why, it's jist temptin' Providence. He oughter be larned a lesson, the blazed old jackass."

"And you're the chap to larn him," answered Foxy, cunningly. "That lay ought to be baby's play to you and Dick Diver."

Plug made no answer, but drew the diagram to his side of the table, and studied it intently. He then leaned back in his chair, and sent a dozen puffs of smoke into the air.

"Well?" queried Foxy anxiously. "What's your notion, Plug?"

"My notion is that you ain't got no more brains nor a cow, Foxy. Talkin' 'bout winders! Look yere, now. D'y'e see this back door, with a transom?"

"Yes."

"That's my lay, then. And that's what I want Jimmy the Kid fur. I'm goin' ter drop him through that hole, and make him shoot the bolt."

Foxy looked at the point indicated.

"Will he do it, Plug? He might squeal."

"I'll skeer all the squeal outer him. Leave that to me. As I said afore, Foxy, you're cod-dlin' the boy too much. He'll smell you out and jump the traces next. The only safe way with a chap like that is ter make him 'feared o' the penitentiary. If he gits the perlice skeer in his noddle once, we've got him safe. He won't dare ter squeal or run."

"That's judgmatical, Plug," declared Foxy, with an approving nod. "Jimmy's too valuable to run any risks. You can have him, if you won't hurt him. I don't want the lad hurt."

"Hurt him? What fur? I mought have ter teach him sense and manners, but you know I'm as tender as a baby. Well, that's settled then. The crib's to be cracked. And I'm to have Jimmy the Kid to go through the transom and slip the bolt."

The pair of villainous confederates were surprised at this point by the sound of steps in the adjoining apartment, and the sudden burst of a youthful form into the room. It was Jimmy the Kid. His face was burning with indignation, and both hands tightly clinched.

"You sha'n't make a fool of me!" he cried hotly. "I heard what you said, and I won't steal for nobody, and I won't go nowhere with Plug Peters!"

"You won't, hey?" Plug's beetle brows frowned ominously.

"No, I won't! there! I never took anything that wasn't mine, and I never will. And if I did, I'd give it back. I don't want anything that I haven't earned."

"Well, I'll be jiggered fur a mule if this ain't rich!" ejaculated Plug. "I'll guv the young 'un a clip, if he don't clap a stopper on that talk-in trap."

"You'd give it back!" exclaimed Foxy angrily. "And wher'd you get it from? Would you steal it from me, after all I've done for you, you ungrateful vagabond?"

"I'd work and earn it!" said the boy earnestly. "I'd earn it, if it took me ten years."

"Well, I'll swow!"

Plug fell back as if paralyzed with astonishment. Then a sudden anger leaped into his harsh face.

"Take that, you ape, and l'arn sense!"

With a swing of his powerful arm he struck the defiant boy a blow on the temple, and hurled him like a log to the floor, where he lay senseless and motionless.

Foxy sprung forward in a fury.

"What made you do that?" he screamed. "I won't have the boy hurt, and if—"

"Oh, belay all that!" growled the ruffian. "He ain't hurt. I only guv him an open-hand, to l'arn him sense. He made me sick with his palaver. To talk 'bout workin' and payin' back swag! Why, it's enough to make a hog sick!"

A look of disgust passed over Plug's face.

"I like the boy, and I won't have him hurt," repeated Foxy.

"Stow all that!" roared Plug. "Don't yer see it were necessary, you old fool? He's got ter be broke in, and that's the first lesson. That clip'll save me trouble with him, when I take him out on the lay. But you'd best lock him up, Foxy, and keep him under lock and key till I want him. He mought try and guv you leg bail if you don't. The Kid's got some spirit. He ain't ter be trusted till we git his neck in the noose."

He jammed on his hat and swaggered from the room. The boy still lay white and insensible on the floor. Foxy looked down on him with a show of anxiety in his ugly face.

"It's for the best," he muttered. "If the imp won't be coaxed he must be pushed. If we get him in too deep for any getting out it'll put an end to all this honest streak. He's the worst case I ever took on, but we'll cure him, 'twixt me and Plug."

He picked up the senseless form in his arms and carried it away. When Jimmy came to his senses he found the old fellow bending anxiously over him. He did not remember just what had happened, but he had a racking headache.

He motioned Old Grimes away with a look of repulsion.

"Now keep right quiet, my dear. I'll send little Jimmy in his supper. Keep right quiet."

Foxy glided away, with a noiseless and stealthy step.

The old rogue did not adopt Plug's advice of locking the boy up. He had too much confidence in his own method for that. But he redoubled his own watchfulness, and gave Billy and the Joker the most stringent orders to be on the lookout, threatening them with severe consequences if they let the boy escape them.

Foxy seemed not to be observing him, but not a movement or expression of the boy escaped his keen little eyes.

"He's took to moping now," he said to Plug Peters a few days afterward. "What's in the wind about that job, Plug? Ain't you losing time?"

"I'm goin' to tap the crib," rejoined Plug. "I've been round thar, and it kin be done. And I'll want the Kid."

"That's all right, so's you don't hurt him. When's the time?"

"Next Monday night, if it's dark enough."

"All right. It's the only cure for Jimmy's honest notions. I know how it is with that sort. They're like boys swimming in cold water. They'll stand and shiver on the bank by the hour; but, push them in once, too deep to get out, and it's all over in a minute. They'll swim when they've got to swim."

"I'll break him in, or break his neck. You oughter know Plug Peters by this time."

This conversation did not pass without a hearer. Jimmy happened to be near the door of the room, and heard his own name mentioned. He listened in trembling anxiety to hear what was said.

He heard too much for his own comfort. He was to be given over to Plug Peters, and he knew that it was for some dishonest purpose. He was afraid to burst in upon the speakers, as before, but he grew desperate at the thought, and determined, let what would come of it, to make an effort to escape.

But he was too young and inexperienced to deal with the old heads that surrounded him. As soon as Foxy Grimes got his keen little eyes on the boy's face, he detected a new expression there.

"Ha!" he said to himself, "there's mischief brewing. The Kid's up to some game. What is it? I must watch. I must watch."

That night, an hour after midnight, Jimmy slyly left his bed in the garret-room of the old mansion. He had not slept a wink, and had waited impatiently for this hour.

He listened. All was still below. Darkness spread everywhere. He tried the door of his room. It was unlocked. The coast was clear.

Trembling in every limb, the young fugitive drew himself step by step onward. He knew his way as well as if it had been broad day.

Following the wall onward he gained the stairs, down which he cautiously passed. But, tread as carefully as he would, they creaked in a way that sent a shiver of apprehension through his scared soul. In that still midnight, every creak seemed to him as loud as a thunder-clap.

He fancied himself discovered twenty times before he reached the lower floor. He had made his way down three of these creaking flights of stairs. Yet odd sounds had come to his ears, as if persons were moving through the house.

He hesitated a moment on this lower floor. He had laid his plans. The doors would be locked, and he might not be able to open them without giving an alarm. It would be better to escape through a window.

There was one that opened on the rear, from which a narrow alley led to a back street. To this the fugitive carefully felt his way. His courage was rising. He heard no sound of alarm. A few minutes more and he would be safely out of that dreadful house. Anything, rather than the life that was laid out for him there.

The window was gained. Slowly he lifted the sash, that slipped noiselessly up. The bolt of the shutter slid back with an unpleasant sound. He pushed the shutters a crack open. The hinges squeaked frightfully.

But the light of the outer night was in the room. He was too near liberty now to hesitate. With a hasty impulse he flung open the shutters, mounted to the window sill, and sprung out to the ground below.

All seemed still. He breathed heavily.

"Safe at last!" he muttered, "and on the road to an honest life. Good-by, Foxy Grimes!"

He hurried to the alley, and was about enter-

ing it, when, to his utter consternation, a hand from each side was laid on his shoulder.

"Can't spare you jist yit, Jimmy!" came the voice of the Joker.

"My eyes, what a lark!" laughed Billy.

"Fetch him here till I strap him, the ungrateful villain!" came Foxy's shrill voice from the door.

Caught! And at the very minute when escape seemed certain! The discovered fugitive felt as if he would sink into the earth.

CHAPTER IV. CRACKING A CRIB.

It was a dark and heavy night. Thick clouds hung upon the face of the sky, shutting out the light of the moon except at rare intervals. There was a damp and shivering chill in the air. Jimmy Snipe, the almshouse waif, curled himself into a ball in the bottom of the wagon in which he was traveling.

He was utterly miserable. Ever since he had been caught in his attempted escape, and brought back into that den of crime, and into the company of the vile wretches who dwelt in it, he had been crushed with fear and horror. The life before him grew more terrible to his eyes with every minute. Yet there seemed no escape from it. He was helpless in the hands of his tormentors.

And now he seemed going to his doom. He had been given over to Plug Peters. On the seat before him sat the brutal wretch, in company with a fellow burglar. The boy could not imagine on what dreadful deed they were bent.

"It's a deuced pretty night," remarked Plug, as the wagon rattled over the streets of the upper city. "Mought be made to order. You're sure you settled the hash of that dorg?"

"That depends on whether he can digest strychnine," laughed the other. "I never saw the dog as could."

They drove on. Soon the rattling noise ceased. The wagon moved quietly. They had left the city streets, and were on a country road.

For miles they drove onward. Then Plug handed the reins to his companion, and turned back to the crouching boy.

"See yere, Jimmy," he began. "I've got a bit o' confab fur yer private ear. You've been a bad boy, ain't you, now, to treat Mr. Grimes the way you've did? And arter all he's done for you."

Jimmy made no answer.

"We tries to sarve you like an angel, but you won't let us," resumed the burglar. "Now I want you to behave right pretty to-night, my laddy, and I'll giv you suthin' nice."

"You ain't going to ask me to steal, Mr. Peters?" asked the trembling boy.

"Lord love ye, no! Wouldn't think o' sich a thing. I on'y want you to slip a trifle of a bolt. That's all."

"But it's not right. You're going to steal! I know you're going to steal!"

"Stow yer jaw, you rat!" cried Plug, angrily. "That's y'r old palaver. I'll bu'st yer jib-boom if I hear it ag'in. Daddy Grimes giv you ter me. Mind that. If you kick cross-ways, I'll smash yer h'iler."

Jimmy attempted no answer to this harsh rebuke. He crouched back frightened.

"How's this?" demanded the other burglar. "What sort o' rabbit have you got there?"

"Never you mind. I've giv my word to l'arn him the trade, and I'll l'arn him."

He drove on with set teeth. A mile more lay behind them. Now the horse was drawn up to a halt, and Plug jumped from the wagon.

"Pass out the tools," he said.

His comrade handed out a couple of canvas bags, that gave the rattle of iron as they fell to the ground.

Plug meanwhile had raised the rear curtain of the wagon, caught Jimmy by the arms and lifted him out. The boy passively submitted.

"There, drive on, Dick. The Blue Boar can't be fur ahead. Put up the team, and then streak fur the stunted pine. I'll wait thar. You kin hit it?"

"Well, I rayther think."

He drove on into the night.

Plug lifted the two heavy bags, which were tied together by a rope, and flung them over his shoulder. He then grasped Jimmy's hand.

"Come, toddle on, youngster!"

The dismayed lad obeyed.

The route now lay over fences and fields. After a quarter of a mile stumble through the dark, Plug halted.

"We'll wait here," he said, flinging down his burden.

Not a word passed between the ill-mated companions. Jimmy sat down in silent misery. He saw that words were useless.

After a time they heard a stumble and a muttered curse.

"Who comes?" challenged Plug.

"Dick Diver."

"Prime. This way."

"Confounded ugly work. It's a bit too dark," growled Dick as he came up.

"Thought you had cat's eyes. Drop yerself down yere. We're an hour too soon."

They flung themselves on the grass. It was cold and cheerless. The thinly-clad boy shivered, but the others were hardened to the weather.

"Now cock yer ears open, Jimmy," said Plug, after a confab with his comrade. "I've got a trifle o' gab cut out. We're goin' to cross lots a bit more, and then we're comin' to a brick wall. D'ye hear?"

"Yes," faltered the youngster.

"Inside that wall ther's a garding and a house. But ther's no dorg. Cause why, that dorg's eat what didn't suit his constertution. S'pose ye don't like dorgs?"

"No."

"Well, that dorg won't bark. He's kicked out. Now, boy, ther's a door in that house with a transom. That's a sort o' top winder jist big enough fer you to crawl through. That's your part o' the job. I'm goin' to drop you through that transom, and you're to unbolt that door. D'ye hear?"

"Yes. A gush of hope came to the boy. He might give the alarm."

"I've got a rope yere," continued the burglar.

"I'll tie that round yer arms and lower you down. And it'll stay whar I tie it, mind that." He bent a savage look on the boy. "If you try any tricks I'll salt yer hash. Come, Dick. Time's up. Let's toddle."

Across fields and along country lanes they journeyed for a half-hour more. It was so dark, and the way so rough, that they had to proceed cautiously. Yet the burglars seemed to know every step of the ground. They laid their course straight as a die.

They next came to a halt beside a brick wall, of about six feet high. It ran off into the darkness to right and left.

Without hesitation Dick climbed it. He took a keen observation of the surroundings.

"All serene. The coast's clear," he muttered, "Pass up the Kid, and the tools."

Plug did so, and then scaled the wall himself.

Before them lay a garden, full of shadowy shrubbery. At some short distance rose the dark outlines of a house, which in the gloom looked large enough for a castle. It was shrouded in darkness, except one window at the side, from which a faint light glimmered.

"Only a night glim," said Dick. "Somebody's afeard o' ghosts."

He sprang down, followed by the others.

The thought was in Jimmy's mind to run, and give the alarm. But Plug clutched him sharply by the shoulder, and harshly whispered:

"None o' that, young 'un. And don't you breathe louder nor a chippy, or I'll brain ye."

This fierce threat swept away the last shred of courage from the timid lad. He was not devoid of spirit, as we know. But cold, hunger, and his deadly fear of his savage companions, had utterly dismayed him. He followed on, silent and cowering.

They were soon under the walls of the house. There was no sign of the dog. Dick's medicine had evidently worked.

It appeared to be a large, rambling old mansion, that loomed far above their heads into the darkness of the night.

"Strike a glim," whispered Plug. "It's too rascally black."

In a minute the lamp of a dark lantern was kindled. It shed a subdued glow on the wall of the house, but its light was screened from every other direction.

"Here's the door." They spoke now only in whispers. "Wait. I'll open the transom."

He availed himself of a box that lay near. The narrow window at the top of the door was fastened by an inside button. But this soon gave way before the skilfully wielded tools of the burglars. The window swung open. It had made a slight noise. They drew back and waited in suspense for several minutes, but all continued quiet. There seemed to be no alarm.

Plug now extracted a long rope from one of the bags. Jimmy stood like a martyr as the ruffian proceeded to tie the ends of this to his arms.

"Now, boy," he sternly whispered, "I'm goin' to put you through that hole, and lower

you down. You've on'y got one job to do, and that's to slip the inside bolt o' this yere door."

"Oh, Mr. Peters, let me go! Oh, let me go! I can't bear to do it! I'll do anything else, if you only don't ask me to do this!"

"Hist, you young jackanapes!" Plug sharply pinched his ear. "Blast yer hide, d'ye want to bring 'em on us? Here, Dick, slip him through. I'll work the rope."

He lifted the boy with one hand as if he had been made of feathers, and passed him up to his confederate on the box.

Dick, with some difficulty, thrust him through the narrow opening. He stuck fast at one point, but a hard shove pushed him through.

He now hung sustained by the rope, which Plug gripped in his strong hands. Slowly paying it out, the boy was lowered until his feet struck the floor within.

"Now, quick about it," ordered Plug, mounting the box. "The bolt, you beggar. I've got my eyes on you!"

In mortal fear the frightened boy fumbled for the bolt. He did not dare to give the alarm, as he had intended.

Yet at this vital instant there came a sound from the interior of the house. It seemed like footsteps, and there was a faint glimmer of light.

The boy nervously clutched the bolt, which his hands had just felt, and jerked it back with a loud clank.

"Ha! What's that? Burglars!"

The voice came from above. There was the sound of running steps, which rapidly approached. The light flashed more clearly.

"Fiends take the luck!" cursed Plug, as he flung open the door. "Douse the glim, Dick. The graft's off. Here, the jigger's open. Snatch the Kid. I'll shoulder the tools. Shoot out lively, for it's neck or nothin' now."

He lifted the heavy bags from the ground, while Dick seized the boy, who stood as if paralyzed.

The alarm seemed spreading. Other steps resounded. The light flashed brightly on the groups.

Dick grasped Jimmy in his strong arms and sought to run. But he met an unexpected obstacle. The rope caught in some projection. With a curse he dropped his burden.

"Burglars! Stop thief! stop thief!" came the cry, while a man's form appeared on the stairs within.

"Blazes! What the thunder keeps you?" cried Plug.

At the same moment there came the report of a shot-gun from within. A cry of pain from the boy succeeded.

With the instinct of self-preservation Dick let him fall and sprung hastily for the bushes.

"The jig's up. Let out. The Kid's cotched it," he cried to his confederate.

Through the bushes they plunged, like wild animals, and scrambled over the wall beyond. Then across the field they dashed, heedless now of everything but their own safety.

Furiously from the house-door rushed a middle-aged man, gun in hand. He fired the second barrel blindly into the bushes, in which the rush of the burglars could be heard.

Others came close behind, a man-servant and a woman who had thrown a dressing-gown hastily round her.

The gentleman rushed fiercely on.

"Here's one!" cried the servant. "You've dropped one! And my, it's only a boy!"

"He's shot! He's bleeding!" cried the woman, excitedly. "And look, he's tied fast! There's a rope around his arms!"

The servant picked Jimmy up as if he had been a salt sack, and carried him into the house.

He was untying the rope from his arms when the gentleman returned in high excitement.

"They are off!" he cried. "All but the one I winged! Why, it's a mere boy! To think of such a child as that being a confederate of burglars. It's too outrageous."

"I ain't!" cried Jimmy, starting forward with clasped hands. "They made me do it! They made me! Oh, sir, forgive me, and don't let them have me! They're trying to make a robber of me, and I can't bear to steal."

"That won't go down," said the gentleman, harshly. "Likely he's a hardened young vagabond. Fetch the light here, Tom. Let me look at him."

The servant, who had now got the rope untied, held the light to Jimmy's innocent face. The countenance revealed certainly looked like anything but that of a hardened criminal. Its appealing innocence seemed fit to move any heart.

The gentleman looked sternly in his face. But he had hardly got a fair glance before he fell back, with upraised hands and blanched cheeks.

"Heaven save us!" he exclaimed. "That face again! It's the boy of the theater. It's the image of—"

"Oh!" cried Jimmy, in a tone of excitement. "It's the gentleman I saw at the theater. Oh, sir, won't you—"

His voice suddenly ceased. He reeled for a moment as if intoxicated, and then fell senseless to the floor. His right leg was crimson with blood.

"Mercy on us! He's fainted from the wound!" exclaimed the woman, in a pitying tone. "He may die! The poor little fellow. Look at his face. That's no thief's face. Pick him up, Tom. Lay him on the lounge. Run for the doctor. He may die!"

The gentleman stood back, clutching the door with trembling fingers. He seemed like one who has received some deep mental shock.

CHAPTER V.

JIMMY IN NEW QUARTERS.

A WEEK has passed since the attempted burglary. Jimmy is still in bed with his wound. Fortunately it was not a very severe one. The doctor has probed and cut out all the shot, some of which had buried themselves deep in the flesh. The victim is still weak and feverish, but is rapidly recovering.

"What you going to do with the child, Mr. Norman?" asked Mrs. Bent, the housekeeper.

"Send him to prison, I suppose, as soon as the doctor will let me," was the harsh answer.

"I do hope you won't. You can't say that child's guilty. Why, it's enough to just look in his innocent young face. I'm sure what he says is true, that the burglars made him do it."

The good woman's voice was full of pity and sympathy.

"You're entirely too soft-hearted, Mrs. Bent," answered Mr. Norman, severely. "We'd have the city alive with young burglars, if they were all let go free. I tell you there's got to be an example."

"Well, I wouldn't make an example of a baby," cried Mrs. Bent, resolutely. "If you put that innocent lad in prison, among hardened criminals, what will come of it? He will be ruined, and his ruin will be on your conscience. Besides, sir, have you not noticed the odd likeness? I am sure you have, for you seemed dreadfully startled when you first saw the boy."

"The likeness? What are you prating about, woman?"

"The likeness to the picture in your study. Why, he's the very image of that picture. I don't know whose portrait that is. I never asked, as I don't think it's my business to ask questions; but—"

"There, there, that will do. Never mind whose portrait it is. Leave me alone. I will think over what you say. But, I'll tell you one thing, Mrs. Bent: it's as bad to be too soft-hearted as to be too hard-hearted. There, now don't let that start you off again."

Mrs. Bent withdrew, a little ruffled in her temper by this blunt dismissal.

"If he'd ever had a boy of his own he wouldn't be such a crooked old curmudgeon," grumbled the good lady. "The little fellow is just lovable, so he is. I can't help warming to him."

Meanwhile Mr. Norman was walking the floor of his library with a very disturbed expression of countenance.

"Hang it, is everybody going to notice it?" he cried fretfully. "There's something extraordinary about this. Can it be that I was deceived in that villain? Where did this young vagabond get his face? It makes my blood run cold whenever I look at him. Who is he? Where did those burglars find him? I must and will know. Can it be his son, alive yet by some strange chance? Are all my deep-laid plans to come to naught, after all these long years? By Heaven, they shall not! I cannot murder, but I can dispose of! I can dispose of!"

There was something very ominous in the tones of his voice, and a sinister look in the harsh lines of his face, as these words came from him. It was evident that some deep and dark secret lay in this man's life. Had he committed a crime? Was evidence of this crime coming to the surface, after years of concealment? His manner seems to say so.

"What is to be done?" He strode the floor with his hand to his brow. "Let me think. I must find that villain who took the boy. Can he have deceived me? Ah! I begin to fear so."

A day or two after this conversation Jimmy

was able to leave his bed. He was still weak, but was strong enough to walk about the house. Mrs. Bent took charge of him. She had taken an immense fancy to the lad, who had told her the whole story of his life, as well as he remembered it.

"Poor little fellow, he is as innocent as I am," she declared. "I do wish I knew what Mr. Norman intends. He sha'n't send the child to prison with my good will, I know that! Why don't he send for the police, and get Jimmy to guide them to the burglars' den? I'm sure the man is acting very queer."

She flitted her dusting rag angrily as she gave utterance to these words.

Mr. Norman had not spoken to his youthful prisoner since his recovery. He seemed, indeed, to avoid him, though he allowed him the free range of the house.

"I leave him to you, Mrs. Bent," he said. "He is not to go out, understand."

"No fear of that. Why the boy must have had a sad fright somewhere. He trembles at the very thought of it. He begged me, almost on his knees, not to let them have him again, and not to make him go out."

"That's right. Keep him in that notion. I have not decided what to do with him yet. But I don't think of sending him to prison."

"I hope you won't. It would be a terrible shame. But the burglars? Are they to go scot free?"

"Wait a while. I will question the boy after a day or two."

Meanwhile Jimmy made full use of his liberty within the house. In addition to Mr. Norman and his housekeeper, the family consisted of several servants. These, however, kept to their own quarter of the house, and the greater part of the rambling old mansion was almost deserted.

It was, as we have said, an extensive edifice, with several long wings. The main building had been erected long before the Revolution, and had been added to from time to time, to suit the fancies of its different occupants.

Jimmy found it of high interest. There seemed no end to its rooms, stairs, and passages. He wandered from one to the other in a dream of delight.

Only a small portion of the house was inhabited. The remainder was left vacant, with all its old-fashioned furniture, the odd old pictures on the walls, the quaint tiled fire-places and mantles, the carved wainscoting, the queer nooks and corners.

Jimmy thought he would like to spend years here, strolling about the old rooms, sitting in the dusty, straight-backed chairs and dreaming of the people who had once lived in these apartments, of the words they had spoken, and the things that had happened to them.

The boy was of a romantic fancy, and all this roused strange dreams in his young mind.

To one room he took a particular fancy. This was an octagonal apartment, lit only by a narrow skylight. There were no windows, and but one door, at the end of a long passage. The furniture was very quaint in pattern, and covered with faded brocade, of a century old. An oak wainscot surrounded the room, to a height of five feet. This was richly carved, and sunk away here and there into nooks and alcoves, as if from some odd whim of the original proprietor.

On the walls hung several old portraits. One of these in particular attracted the boy. Why, he could not have told. It seemed familiar to him, something like himself in fact. He could not help thinking that he might himself look like that when he got to be very old, eighty or a hundred years, as he fancied.

But the romantic lad had not yet learned all the secrets of the room. As he stood one day gazing at this picture in the dim light that came down through the dusty skylight, and wondering who it could represent, and what interesting story lay behind it, there came a deep, hollow groan that sent every drop of blood in his body shivering to his heart.

He stood with white face and trembling hands, gazing with distended eyes upon the picture, from whose lips the sound had seemed to come. He was too much scared to move.

It came again, a hollow, blood-curdling groan. It was not from the picture now, but from everywhere. It seemed to emanate from every part of the wall.

Jimmy turned with a cry of fear, and ran hastily from the room, hardly able to keep his feet in his deep agitation. He seemed to hear the patter of ghostly feet behind him as he fled blindly onward.

At the end of the passage he met Mr. Nor-

man, who was advancing in that direction, with a basket in his hand.

He caught the frightened boy by the arm, and held him fast, while he gazed sternly into his pallid face.

"What ails you?" he cried, shaking him fiercely. "Why, you are as white as the wall!" "Oh, don't go that way, sir! You don't know! There's something terrible! Don't go into that room!"

"Aha! So you got into the ghost-room, did you? You'll keep clear of it now, my boy, I reckon. What was it? What did you see?"

"Nothing, sir. But I heard such a dreadful groan. I can't get over it."

"Then keep in safer quarters. Away now."

"But, you ain't going there?"

"I ain't afraid of the ghost," answered Mr. Norman, with an odd laugh. "Not by daylight, anyhow. He is an old acquaintance of mine. And, somehow, he always takes a fancy for scaring little boys."

"It came from that old picture," continued Jimmy. "The gentleman with the long beard and the curly hair. I could almost see the mouth open and the groan come out. Who is the old gentleman, Mr. Norman? Is there any dreadful story about him?"

"He is my great grandfather," said Mr. Norman smiling. "They tell terrible things about him. You had best keep away from that room."

"I will," answered Jimmy, devoutly. "I'll never go near it again."

The gentleman passed on, quietly laughing to himself, while the startled boy hurried away to a safer part of the house.

Mrs. Bent was occupied in the housekeeper's room when the ghost-seeing lad hastily entered. He was still somewhat pale and excited.

"What is the matter?" she asked kindly.

"I've been so scared, Mrs. Bent!"

"Scared? What do you mean?"

"I've heard a ghost."

"Heard a ghost? Folks see ghosts, they don't hear them."

"Yes they do. I did anyhow. Such a groan, Mrs. Bent! Oh dear, how it scared me!"

"Ha! So you've been in the haunted room?"

"The haunted room? Why didn't you tell me? I didn't know there was a ghost, or I'd never gone there, I know."

"I didn't imagine it could be heard in broad daylight. I thought it was only to be heard at dead midnight. There is not a person in the house would venture into that room at night for a fortune. Nor in the daytime either, I fancy."

"Oh mercy! and what is it? What has been seen? Won't you tell me the story?"

"All sorts of queer hobgoblins have been seen by venturesome servants. But I believe that's all fancy. Some folks can see a ghost in a shadow. But the sound is there. I've heard that myself."

"So have I," said Jimmy, with a quiver. "And I never want to hear it again."

"There is a story," continued Mrs. Bent. "It is about an ancestor of Mr. Norman, whose portrait hangs in that room."

"The old-fashioned gentleman, with the curly hair and the beard?" asked Jimmy, with breathless interest.

"You have noticed it then? They say he was murdered in that room, by the lady to whom he was to be married. It is a story of treachery and jealousy. She was made to believe he was false to her, and had deceived her. In a fit of passion she stabbed him to the heart. He gave a terrible groan when he fell, and he has been groaning ever since. The room has been deserted from that day."

"And the lady?" asked Jimmy.

"She killed herself, too. It was a terrible sequel to love and jealousy."

"I don't think she'd have been a nice woman to marry; and I know I'm going to keep out of that room after this," said Jimmy, as he walked away very thoughtfully.

Mrs. Bent looked after him with a meaning smile.

"A ghost without a story would be a poor concern," she considered. "Yet I have a fancy that that story has been manufactured to fit the ghost. There is something very strange in Mr. Norman's movements. What takes him so often in that direction? And what goes with all the food from his table? He must have an enormous appetite to eat it all. There is something mysterious about this house. I am not very curious, but I'd give something to find it out. The portrait in his study that so closely resembles this boy. What has become of it? It has disappeared. Does he fear some one will notice the likeness?"

The good lady fell into a brown study. She had been for two years housekeeper for Mr. Norman. In that period many strange things had come under her observation. There was a secret in this house, that she was sure of. What was it? She shook her head doubtfully. It was too deep for her powers.

While these events were taking place in Mr. Norman's mansion, the older friends of Jimmy the Kid were not quite at their ease.

Foxy Grimes and Plug Peters had more than one conference over the loss of the boy. The old fence was very angry over the result of the attempted burglary.

"You're a sweet pair, you are," he said spitefully. "You'll bring the cops down on me; that will be the end of this business. I never saw such a rascally botch."

"Oh, you dry up, old seven-and-sixpence! You'd guv a game cow the blues, with your snarlin' and backbitin'. I dunno as me and Dick Diver is quite babies and greenies. S'pose we'd 'ave left the Kid behind on'y we had to streak like wax? I reckon not."

"You have left him, anyhow. He's hurt now, but as soon as he's about he'll fetch the cops here."

"Then you'd best dust for new quarters."

"I don't want to if I can help it."

"Why don't yer rattle the Kid?" suggested the Joker, who was listening to this conference, from behind the smoke of his long pipe. "Let me and Billy smell round the crib. We mought snatch 'im. Lordy, I'd skeer 'im so he wouldn't whimper, if I onc't got my fivers on his hide."

"I don't like that plan," answered Foxy. "It's too uncertain. Can't we work some traverse to get into the house and pump the kitchen wenches? It's best to know how the land lays."

"See yere," rejoined Plug earnestly. "All that's taffy. Hit at the top, I say, not at the bottom. You're a sly old coon, Foxy Grimes. You kin talk as sweet as loaf sugar, and kin put on a gentleman's toggery and act so's yer own mother wouldn't know you. Now, it's my idee that you git yerself up and call on the gentleman of the house. Any kind o' bizness 'll answer, so's you fetch in some p'int's 'bout the boy."

"I'll do it!" cried Foxy, hastily adopting this suggestion. "I can get the lay of the shanty, at any rate. Then, maybe, you can plant the graft again and carry off the swag and the Kid together."

"Git the p'int's fu'st, and we'll see," answered Plug impatiently. "Smell out the ground, that's my idee. Sound the old coon. You know how he turned like buttermilk the fu'st time he see'd the boy. There's suthin' more'n we twig about this bizness. He mought be glad to git shet o' him."

"I'll do it," rejoined Foxy. "I've got just the togs. I'm going to be a solid merchant as deals in coffee, and wants a cargo of Maracaibo."

"That's yer sort. I'm bound to break in that young devil."

CHAPTER VI.

A LAMB AGAINST THREE WOLVES.

MR. NORMAN was seated in his study, intently occupied with some papers, that seemed important from his close study of them, when a visitor was announced.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"He gives the name of Mr. Merkel."

"I don't know any one of the name. However, show him up."

He gathered his papers into a parcel and placed them in an inner drawer of a cabinet before him, as if not wishing other eyes to see them.

The person who entered was tall and thin, with a long, ill-favored face, and hooked nose. He was dressed in a suit of quiet brown, of old-fashioned cut, but well preserved.

"Mr. Norman?"

"Yes, sir. At your service."

"My name is Merkel. I am in the coffee line. Have a cargo of prime Java coming in, and thought I might put some with you."

"You will excuse me, sir. I never do business except at my office. Why did you not call there?"

"I happened to be out this way, and thought I'd take a look in on you. A fine old place this."

The visitor helped himself to a seat, took off his hat, and mopped his brow with a red silk handkerchief.

"I know that," answered Mr. Norman impatiently. "Excuse me if I say I am busy."

"Certainly, sir. Business is business. By

the way, Mr. Norman, I hear that some burglars tried to victimize you recently."

"Yes."

"And that you nabbed one of them."

"A boy, sir. A mere boy."

"Indeed? And pray, sir, what did you do with the boy? Send him to the lock-up?"

"No," answered Mr. Norman, shortly. "He was hurt. I shot at the horse and hit the colt. I have him here yet."

"Ah! I'm glad to hear that. I have a motive in these questions, Mr. Norman."

"You have en?" The gentleman looked at his visitor more closely.

"I will tell you my motive," Mr. Merkel used his red handkerchief more industriously. "I fancy this boy is the son of a friend of mine, a Mr. Peters. His son was coaxed away, sir, by a pair of bad boys, very bad boys. They were young thieves, in fact. I hate to say it, but we have nurseries of young thieves in this cit."

"I imagine so," Mr. Norman had grown interested. He looked at his visitor more closely than that gentleman seemed to like.

"I believe my friend's son was coaxed into one of these bad places, sir. They tried to make a thief of him."

"How do you know all this?"

"I found the bad boys that led him off, by aid of the police. They had to tell me the story. I learn that the lad was given over to some burglars, and that he is the same one who was captured in the attempt on your house."

"Well, that is decidedly interesting. But how comes it that you are hunting him up, instead of the father?"

"You must know, sir, what a father's feelings are. Mr. Peters is a plain, blunt man, but he has a heart, sir, he has a heart. He is overcome with grief. He knows the boy is not bad at bottom. If he could but recover him—"

Mr. Merkel hesitated, while he used the handkerchief more freely than before.

"This is a singular story," said Mr. Norman to himself. "This old fellow has the face of a hypocritical scoundrel. I don't half believe him. He has something else in view. I must find out what."

At this moment the door of the study was opened somewhat abruptly, and Jimmy appeared.

"Mr. Norman," he broke out, impulsively.

"Mrs. Bent sent me—"

He suddenly ceased, while his face grew white as his eyes fixed themselves on the sanctimonious countenance of the visitor. A cry of dismay broke from his lips, while he backed hastily out, and closed the door behind him.

Mr. Merkel seemed equally disconcerted. He wiped his dry lips with the handkerchief, and a muttered sound came from him that was very like an oath.

"Excuse me," cried Mr. Norman, springing up. "I must see what ails that boy. You will wait for me here. Understand." His voice had a tone of menace.

"Oh, never mind him," answered Mr. Merkel, with a forced laugh, though he had grown pale. "He knows me, the young rascal. He knows I am here to take him to his father."

Mr. Norman hastily returned from the door, to which he had advanced. He laid his hand on the table, and gazed into his visitor's face with a keen look that made that gentleman very uneasy.

"See here, Mr. Merkel," he said. "You are welcome to the young vagabond. I don't want him, and never want to look on him again. Where is his father?"

"He is close at hand. I didn't like to bring him until I saw you."

"Very well. Bring him in. You can have the boy, so you promise to keep him out of my sight. But I tell you he is a sorry young villain."

"I know it, sir. He lies dreadfully. You will find as soon as my back is turned he will be trying to make me out a burglar, or something worse."

"Very likely. But I promise you not to believe him. Now bring the father. I will return him his son."

"A thousand thanks, sir. You are doing a good deed, in giving back that wicked boy to his disconsolate father. Heaven will reward you."

When Mr. Merkel was fairly out of the room, he used the handkerchief to more effect than ever. His brow was covered with a cold sweat.

"He's a keen one," he muttered. "He reads me like a book. But he wants to get rid of that boy. He has an object, the old rascal. If he hadn't he wouldn't see me again. Hang him, he made my very toe-nails tremble."

Meanwhile Mr. Norman walked his study with short, troubled strides, though with a look of satisfaction on his face.

After a minute he opened the study door, and looked out. There stood the boy, as white as if he had met another ghost.

"Come here," cried Mr. Norman, sternly. "What ailed you just now? No lie, mind you. I want the truth."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Jimmy, with folded hands, "what did that dreadful man want here? It's Foxy Grimes, sir! It's the terrible old man that gave me to the burglars! Is he after me, sir? Oh, you won't ever give me back to him?"

"No lies, I tell you, boy," cried Mr. Norman, harshly. "He has told me all about you, and how you ran away from your father. He seems a very respectable gentleman. I have no doubt you have been a bad boy, and nearly broken your poor father's heart."

"Oh, sir, he has told you dreadful stories!" exclaimed Jimmy, in an agony of terror. "It's him that keeps the fence-shop, and that's mixed up with Plug Peters, the burglar."

Mr. Norman looked with stern doubt at the faltering and frightened boy.

"You have got your story very pat," he coldly answered. "But it won't do. Your father wants you, and the law gives you to him. You must go home, and try and be a better boy."

"Go home!" cried Jimmy in despair. "I never had no home, except the almshouse. And I never had no father that I know of. And I wish you'd kill me before you give me back to those dreadful men!"

His conversation was interrupted by the re-entrance of Mr. Merkel, accompanied by a harsh-featured individual, who seemed making a great effort to put on a look of paternal emotion.

"I have brought the father, as you requested, Mr. Norman. This gentleman is Mr. Peters, the poor parent whose heart has been broken by that bad boy."

"Yer sarvant, sir," said Peters, with a woe-begone expression. "I'm yere arter my boy, as has sarved me the durndest trick, and as I hear you're willin' to guv him back, many thanks to yer Honor."

"It's a lie! It's all a wicked lie!" screamed Jimmy, springing up from the corner where he had been cowering. "This is Foxy Grimes, that keeps the fence shop. And this is Plug Peters, the burglar, that tried to rob your house. Oh, sir, kill me, kill me! But, don't let them take me!"

"Keep quiet, Jimmy. I will settle with these gentlemen. Mr. Peters, is this—"

Mr. Norman suddenly became silent, while a look of surprise came over his face. He had at that moment taken his first good look at his visitor.

His surprise seemed to be shared by Peters, from whose bearded lips came a deep but suppressed exclamation.

They stood looking at one another in silence for a minute. Then Mr. Norman pointed to the door.

"This way, sir. I would like a minute's private conversation with you."

Peters followed him from the room. There was on his dark face a look divided between triumph and consternation.

Reaching the outer room the two men stood gazing on one another in silence. Mr. Norman's face seemed full of various emotions. Peters was sullen and expectant.

"I know you," cried Mr. Norman, angrily. "I recognize your rascally face. Twelve years ago you took my money to do a certain service. How was your work done?"

"I 'arned my swag," answered the sullen villain. "I weren't to squelch the brat, but on'y to leave the critter whar it'd never trouble you ag'in. An' that's what I did."

"You lie, you rogue! You put it in the New York almshouse. Not a word. This is the boy. I can't mistake those features. That's what I get from dealing with a dishonorable villain."

Peters stood silent and disconcerted for a minute.

"It's durned queer how things 'll turn up," he said. "Who ever thought you'd see the critter ag'in? or that he'd bu'st straight fur your house? It's thunderin' odd. Howsomever, I'm his dad, you know. Pass him over to me, and the Kid won't trouble you no more."

A look of satisfaction came into Mr. Norman's soulless face.

"You will keep it an absolute secret?"

"On condition as yer Honor pays me so much keep money every year. It's expensive to fetch up a young buzzer."

"You will take care that he doesn't drift out of your hands? He must be spoiled for honest society."

"I'll larn him the perfession," answered Plug, with a coarse laugh. "I said as I'd do that, and I never says on'y what I means."

"Come, then."

He led the way back into his study.

Here they found Old Grimes seated close beside Mr. Norman's desk, with his hat on his knees, and a hypocritical look on his face.

Jimmy was cowering in a corner, with pallid face and staring eyes. He darted forward on seeing Mr. Norman, and caught his hand impulsively.

"You ain't going to give me to them?" he cried. "Oh, Mr. Norman, don't give me to them! I'd sooner go to prison! I'd sooner work my arms off for you!"

"This is ridiculous, boy," answered Mr. Norman, severely. "This is your father. I am satisfied of that. I am astonished that you should tell me such lies. The law gives him the right to take you, and I cannot object, even if I wanted to."

Jimmy released his hand, and gazed from one to the other of his tormentors like a scared rabbit.

"Come, come, little fellow," said Foxy, with a great show of kindness. "Don't be scared. Nobody wants to hurt you."

"Why, don't you know I'm yer daddy?" remarked Plug. "Jist you come home, and you kin live like a baby show."

"I won't go with you! I won't go with you!" screamed the tormented boy. "I'm afraid of you, and I'd sooner die than live with you!"

The door was open before him. With a quick leap he sprung through it, and darted away at full speed.

"Thunder and lightnin'!" cried Plug. "The Kid's off!"

"After him! Catch him!" exclaimed Mr. Norman in alarm. "He must not escape to the street!"

The three men plunged out after the flying boy. He was just visible, at the end of the passage, darting into a room beyond.

They followed with all haste. It was no trifling chase. The fugitive was winged with fear, and shot like a deer through room after room, along halls, up and down stairs, from point to point of that extensive house.

At times the pursuers lost sight of him, but they followed closely. It seemed but a question of a few minutes ere they would run him down, with their superior strength and speed.

And now the boy's course lay toward the uninhabited part of the mansion. In a minute he was darting along the passage leading to the "ghost room."

A look of satisfaction came to Mr. Norman's face on observing this.

"You can take it cool now," he said. "There is no outlet from this passage. Our bird is caged."

They advanced more slowly, on this assurance.

As for the flying boy, he dashed into the octagonal room. He looked around with scared eyes, and recognized where he was.

There was no door of escape. It was fatal to return. What should he do?

In an agony of apprehension he squeezed into one of the alcoves of the wainscoting, opposite to the portrait by which he had formerly been so frightened.

He pushed in as tightly as if he hoped he would not be seen in this nook. Knees, body, and arms were almost knotted into the firm wood, until the boy's frame seemed like one of the old time carvings.

Suddenly there came a sharp crack. It felt to him as if everything was giving way before him. The wall seemed to gape open and let him fall headlong forward.

Another crack followed, less sharp than the former.

The next instant the pursuers, who had slackened their pace to a walk, entered the room, in full expectation of finding the runaway boy at their mercy.

To their utter surprise, and particularly that of Mr. Norman, the room was empty. No sign of the fugitive was visible, and no aperture by which he could have escaped. Wall, wainscot, floor, were all whole and sound. It seemed as if some magic must have been at work.

They looked at one another in dismay and consternation.

"What does this mean?" asked Grimes, in utter astonishment.

"Heaven knows! I don't!" exclaimed Mr.

Norman, whose lips were deathly white. "Has magic been at work? It is a most extraordinary circumstance!"

CHAPTER VII.

ON GUARD FOR A GHOST.

THE three rascals stood looking at one another in strange dread. There seemed something miraculous in the remarkable disappearance of the fugitive.

Yet in Plug Peters's dark face there was a show of suspicion.

"The Kid ain't no caterpillar, to crawl inter a keyhole," he hoarsely declared. "You're playin' some traverse on us, Mr. Norman. It's yer own biz, I s'pose; but I ain't goin' to swallow bein' made a fool on."

"You saw him enter this room," answered Mr. Norman, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "Show me how he got out, I would like to know."

"It's the queerest thing I ever seen," cried Foxy. He was trembling with fear or excitement. "Yet these old-time houses have their secrets. Is there any hiding-place behind that wainscot?"

Mr. Norman turned pale.

"No, no," he hastily answered. "That is ridiculous. Where do you suppose it would be? This is the outer wall of the house."

"I've heered of the like before," continued Foxy. "If this is the house wall why isn't there any winders? There might be walls thick enough to have secret stairs, and hidden doors, and all that sort of thing! The boy ain't no shadow. Where is he?"

He looked significantly at Mr. Norman, whose face was still pallid. He hesitated before speaking.

"Understand me," he said at length. "I want you to have the boy. It is no doings of mine that he has escaped. I think I know where he has gone, but I am not able to follow him."

"What the blazes is the reason?" queried Plug, harshly. "That cock won't crow."

"There is a secret stair in the walls of this house," continued the gentleman. "It was used in Revolutionary times. But I only know of it by hearsay. I have no idea where it is. I have often sought for it in vain."

"Oh, that's too thin! How come the Kid to know 'bout it?"

"He has discovered the entrance in some way. I caught him prowling in this part of the house several days ago."

"Where does the secret passage lead to?" asked Foxy.

"Ah, you remind me," exclaimed Mr. Norman, hastily. "He may escape by the other end, while we are wasting time here. All I know is it is said to run underground, and come out somewhere in a bit of rough ground back of the house. The young rascal can't stay in the passage. He must come out at one end or the other. We will guard both ends, and nab him when he shows his face."

"That's what I calls a mighty sound idea," remarked Plug, approvingly.

"Very well. You stay here on guard, Mr. Merkel. Mr. Peters can guard the outer opening of the secret avenue."

"But s'pose some of the house folks want to know what I am doing here?" suggested Foxy.

"What am I to say?"

"The house folk won't trouble you."

"What's the reason?"

"Because this room has the reputation of being haunted. They could not be drawn here with ropes."

"Oh, the blazes!" cried Foxy, in alarm, following them hastily as they were leaving. "Just see here, Mr. Norman! Ghosts, you know—"

"Go back, you old fool. It's all stuff to scare children. At any rate, the ghost only walks at midnight, and it never leaves the room. You may stay in the passageway, if you're afraid of the room."

He laughed heartily on leaving the superstitious old rogue to his unpleasant duty.

"The fool is as shaky as a leaf," he remarked to Peters. "He'll see more ghosts in the next five hours than there have been in the house for a century."

"You oughtn't ter told 'im that stuff," growled Plug.

"I didn't fancy he was such a baby. I will have to go back and bolster up his courage. This is the spot, Peters."

They had left the house and grounds, passing through the wall by means of a small rear gate.

Here was a wild, uncultivated piece of ground, covered with small trees and underbrush. It was on a rather steep hillside, rocky here and there, and leading down to a small brook that gurgled along the ravine below.

It was just the spot for the opening of a secret passage.

"The story goes that the outer opening is somewhere on this hillside. Just where I can't say, though I have hunted for it. I will leave you here on guard. If the boy comes out this way he can't escape your eyes."

"I reckon not," growled Plug. "Not if he tried it on by daylight. I'd like amazin' to snatch the young coon."

"It will be money in your pocket. I will tell you this. That boy must not trouble me further. I will make it worth your while to aid me to get rid of him."

Mr. Norman hurried away. He seemed as if he did not care to be questioned too closely by his villainous scout.

The day passed slowly by. The two rascally sentries remained hopefully on their posts. The fugitive boy must, sooner or later, emerge from his hiding-place, and they were prepared to wait for a week, if necessary, to capture him. They felt the danger of leaving him at large, with his knowledge of their haunts.

Could Mr. Norman be deceiving them? Could this be all a game, to bring the police down on them? No, they were not the sort of birds to be caught with chaff.

Plug Peters knew enough to know that he held the anxious gentleman under his thumb, and that the latter had some good reason for getting rid of the boy.

Foxy Grimes also was too old a coon not to see through Mr. Norman. He knew that the gentleman was a villain at heart, and that Jimmy was somehow in his way. He had not failed to notice the signs of secret understanding between the gentleman and the burglar. It was evident that there was something in the wind more than he had fathomed. What was it? He determined to find out.

The behavior of their employer that day did not fail to strengthen their confidence. He made frequent visits to their post of observation, eager, excited, and disappointed at their ill luck. Evidently he had some strong interest in their success.

The day slowly passed. Night came on. And yet there were no signs of the fugitive boy. Hours had passed away. Where was he? The mystery deepened. Was there a secret passage? Or was it not all a wild notion of Mr. Norman's scared brain? But if not, how had the boy escaped? He was not a rat, to burrow in the earth. And even a rat must come out in time. There was nothing for it but to wait.

It was cold out of doors. Plug Peters drew his heavy coat closely around him as he lay on guard. The cold little troubled him. He had laid out for hours on many a winter night on watch to commit a burglary.

He half wished he had posted Foxy to open the house for him. Here was a good chance to finish the job in which he had been defeated before.

"But it won't do," he muttered. "Norman's too keen a coon not to watch sich chaps as me and Foxy. Bet he don't snooze a wink to-night."

It was a clear moonlight. Every object was visible in the pale light. Nobody could come out on that hillside unseen by his sharp eyes. There was no danger of his sleeping on his post. He was not that sort.

With Foxy Grimes, things were not quite so comfortable. As the evening shadows lengthened, and the room grew dark, a growing doubt troubled him. What if there was a ghost? He was full of superstition, and could not keep himself from trembling with fear as the darkness thickened.

"What did he tell me about that ghost for?" grumbled the old coward, glaring around him with apprehension. "I don't believe there is any such things. Yet it does make a man shiver. Why don't he fetch me a light? I ain't going to stay here in the dark. S'pose there is a ghost! S'pose something dreadful— Ah!"

He sprang wildly to his feet, pressing both hands on his ears, and shivering like a leaf in the wind.

A hollow groan had rung through the room, a dreadful sound that made him tremble to the very marrow of his bones.

"Holy Jericho, what's that?"

Away he dashed, as if a spectral avenger was at his heels. Along the passage which led from the haunted room he plunged headlong. As he broke into the apartment at its extremity the

sound of a footstep and a gleam of light met him, and brought him to a sharp halt. Was the ghost heading him off?

The next instant Mr. Norman entered the room, bearing a lamp.

"I thought I would bring you a light," he remarked. "Ha! What is wrong? Why, man, you are as yellow as sulphur!"

"The ghost! The ghost!" faltered the shivering old rogue.

"The ghost? Have you seen anything?"

"I heard a frightful groan."

"And did not wait to see what gave it, eh!" laughed Mr. Norman, with a show of relief. "Well, that's all there is. That room has been haunted by a groan for a century. But no one has ever seen anything. I fancy a mere sound won't hurt you."

"I wouldn't spend another hour there for a million dollars!"

"You scary old coward!" laughed Mr. Norman. "Well, stay here then. No one can leave that room without passing through this. And this light may give you some heart."

"I don't care for flesh and blood. But there are things that are neither man, angel, or devil! I can't stand such as them."

"Keep this door shut to hide the light. And keep still. The boy may seek to steal out this way. If the door opens—"

"It might be the ghost!"

"Hush, you old fool. You are not quite an idiot, I hope. If the door opens it will be the boy. Don't let him escape again."

"I won't."

Mr. Norman left him to his solitary vigil.

An hour passed. All was still. Mr. Norman looked in on him again. The old fellow began to regain courage. He tried to persuade himself that the groan was all fancy.

Another hour passed by. A wicked grin showed on his ugly face.

"I wish I'd posted Plug. I might have let him in," he muttered. "But maybe to catch Jimmy'll pay better than to bust the safe. Anyhow I've sprung these papers. There might be money in them. Reckon I'll investigate."

He produced a handful of papers from his pocket. The inveterate old thief had not been idle during the five minutes in which he had been left alone in Mr. Norman's study, while the latter was holding a private interview with the burglar. Foxy had taken the opportunity to make a raid upon the cabinet. His skill had quickly shown him a secret drawer, and he had hastily extracted the documents he now held.

The hoary thief rose and locked the door leading to the inhabited part of the house. It would not be comfortable to be caught by Mr. Norman perusing his secret papers.

Then drawing the lamp nearer he opened the documents one by one and ran his eye quickly over their contents.

As he did so he licked his jaws with an air of great satisfaction, while a light of triumph beamed from his yellow eyes.

"Aha!" he cried. "Who says old Foxy isn't wide awake? Talk about the boy! Why, I've got here what's worth a dozen boys. I've got the whip hand of the rich old coon. Won't I make him bleed some before he gets back these interesting documents? Oh, no! Certainly not! I wouldn't be so hard-hearted!"

He laughed with a grating laugh of satisfaction, as he opened the last of the stolen papers, and ran his eye over its contents.

"Well!" he declared, dashing the paper with energy on the table. "I thought I was a rogue; but I'm an honest fellow alongside of this gentleman."

As he spoke a startling sound met his ears. The door behind him was opening. He turned sharply round with an impulse of affright. It was somebody from the haunted room! Was it the boy, for whom he had been on guard?

One glance was enough. The old rascal sprang to his feet with a yell of terror, utterly forgetting the papers he had been examining.

And, with good reason. For there, framed in the doorway against the dark background beyond, stood a frightful apparition.

It was the figure of a man, very tall and very thin, with a cadaverous face, of the dead whiteness of a corpse. His eyes looked hollow, as if they were of glass with a light behind them. His hair and beard were snowy white, and hung down on his breast and shoulders. His dress had a sheet-like whiteness. He stood there, with one hand uplifted, and his eyes fixed on the solitary sentinel with what seemed an awful glare of reproach.

Old Grimes took no time for a second glance. He darted wildly for the door, while another yell of terror came from his lips, as it failed to

yield to his hand. He forgot that he had locked it himself.

What terrors of apprehension ran through the old rascal's soul in that frightful minute it would be difficult to tell. He could hear a ghostly tread. He seemed to feel skeleton hands at his throat. Every vein in his body seemed to be turned to ice.

He fumbled in wild agony at the door. More by chance than design he happened to turn the key. The door opened and he plunged headlong out.

As he did so, he ventured one glance back. His eyes seemed drawn in spite of himself. The ghost had vanished, the papers he had left on the table had also vanished. He saw everything as in a flash. But he would not have returned for a fortune. He drove onward like a mad bull, quite beside himself with terror.

"What's the matter, you idiot?" cried Mr. Norman, seizing and shaking him severely.

"The ghost! The ghost! Oh, such a sight, such a sight, for these old eyes to see!"

And on he plunged, too wild with fright to stop for man or demon. Not till he had rammed his head under the sofa in Mr. Norman's study was his mad flight checked.

But we must return to the other scout, who was keeping his silent vigil in the moonlight without.

A half-hour or more had passed after Foxy's fright when his fellow-conspirator caught a glimpse of something moving in the bushes below.

"Ha!" he muttered. "There's su'thin' alive in them diggin's. Mought be a dorg, though, or a polecat. Got to be keeful."

He advanced cautiously, keeping himself out of view. Now he could make out a human figure, but one that seemed much taller than that of the fugitive boy.

It stood motionless, and seemed to have the face turned toward him.

Suddenly there came a flash. A gleam of light was thrown on the figure. Plug's hair rose as he gazed, for it was the same white-dressed, hollow-eyed, corpse-like specter, which had given his confederate such a scare.

The startled villain sprang from his covert with a cry of terror.

In an instant the light vanished and the figure seemed to disappear. He rubbed his eyes. The specter had vanished as if it had been transformed into the clear moonlight.

This was more frightful still, and he dashed away, with all the horror of superstition in his soul.

In this blind fear he knew not where he went. Up the hill and across the field he hurried. It seemed to him as if he had left miles behind him, when suddenly he found himself standing again on the brink of the ravine.

He had turned in the dark, and had been running in a circle.

Was the ghost there still? Something was moving before him. But it was a much shorter and slither figure.

Plug gazed for an instant and then sprang forward with a shout of triumph.

His strong hand closed on a slender arm. His fierce eyes glared into a shrinking face.

It was the arm and face of Jimmy the Kid!

A scream of horror came from the boy's lips as he recognized the brutal face above him. As if he had been suddenly bereft of life he sunk down in a motionless heap at the feet of his foe.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT JIMMY FOUND IN THE SECRET PASSAGE.

BUT we must return to the fugitive, who had so strangely disappeared in the mysterious room.

Surprised as his pursuers had been by Jimmy's disappearance, his surprise was still greater than theirs.

He had heard a sharp click as he ground his hands in despair against the ornaments of the oaken wainscot. Then everything seemed suddenly to give way, and he fell forward as if into a bottomless abyss.

There came another click. He was in utter darkness. He found himself lying on what seemed a stone floor, though the darkness was frightfully dense.

Jimmy continued to lie where he had fallen. He was in no haste to move. He wanted time to collect his scattered senses. Such a marvelous escape as this, when he expected to fall into the hands of his merciless foes, was enough to disturb his wits.

He heard voices, that seemed dull and far off. They were those of his pursuers. By listening intently he was even able to make out some of their words, and learn that a

watch was to be set to catch him when he should emerge from his hiding-place.

"I've got to be mighty careful," said Jimmy to himself. "I wish they'd let me be. I ain't done nothing to them."

By this time he had recovered his wits. He stretched out his arms, with the hope of discovering into what sort of a magic place he had fallen.

His hands encountered a stone wall on each side. On rising he could feel a wall of stone above his head. He appeared to be in a narrow avenue, wrought into the walls of the old building.

He was afraid to move. A single false step might plunge him into some deep abyss. He felt forward with his foot. It encountered only vacant air. Was there some dreadful hollow before him, into which he might tumble headlong!

Suddenly the entrapped lad remembered that he had some matches in his pocket. They had been given him on the night of the burglary by Plug Peters, to be used on an emergency, and remained there still.

With a surge of hope in his heart he struck one of these matches. The kindling blaze quickly flared up, and threw the scene into strong illumination.

He saw that he stood in a passage not more than two feet wide, and six feet high. It was built of great blocks of stone, while the ceiling formed an arch of brickwork.

What he had fancied to be a bottomless pit he now saw to be a stairway, very steep and narrow, and winding downward through the wall of the building.

On the side of this entrance was a stout oaken door. It opened and closed, as he saw, by a spring. Young as Jimmy was he was sharp enough to guess the meaning of this. This door, so visible here, was hidden on the opposite side. It must form part of the wainscot, and be opened by a secret spring, concealed among the ornaments. He must have pressed the spring in his terror, and tumbled through the quickly-opening door, which had sprung to behind him.

With a sputter the match went out, and left him again in total darkness. But, Jimmy had seen enough to post him in the situation. There were the stairs before him. He decided to feel his way down them in the dark, and save his few matches for greater emergencies.

With a smile of hope and triumph the youthful adventurer advanced. Feeling his way heedfully with his feet, and keeping his hands firmly pressed against the sides of the passage, he slowly descended, step after step.

After he had gone down a half-dozen of the steep steps the wall failed to the left. His arm thrust itself to its full length into an alcove or aperture of some kind. What it meant he could not conjecture. But he quickly felt the wall again on the opposite side of this opening, and proceeded down the sharply winding stairway.

Strange thoughts came into the boy's mind as he progressed. What was this passage made for? Who had trodden it last? Did it lead to some dungeon, or some dreadful place where people had been tortured in old times? He shuddered with fear as these romantic notions passed through his mind.

He could bear the darkness no longer. Striking one of his remaining matches he threw its light on the scene around him.

To his surprise he found himself at the foot of the narrow stair in that direction. One step more would bring him into a broad, flagged aperture, a triangular apartment built in the walls of the old house.

Jimmy was sharp enough to catch the hang of this. The room he had left was not square, but eight-sided. This made four triangular corners in the wall; and, he conjectured that the stair and the room he now stood in, occupied one of these thick corners.

He stepped quickly forward, ere his match should go out. A hasty glance showed him another flight of the stairway, descending again from an opposite corner of the room. But it showed him more than this. A narrow iron door was visible in one side of the triangular wall, with the key still in its lock.

And, close beside it, to the delight of the fugitive, lay a candle, which looked as if it might have been dropped there a century before, so begrimed and covered with cobwebs it appeared.

His match went out at this instant. But that mattered little now to the venturesome boy. Some one had been here years before, some one who had an errand in that locked room. He had dropped his half-burned candle while locking the door. The candle had gone out. The person, whoever he was, knowing the route per-

fectly well, had not taken the trouble to light it again, but had felt his way out.

"He left it for me," said Jimmy, gleefully, as these fancies ran through his brain.

Lighting another match he picked up the candle and tried to kindle it. The wick had rotted away, but the tallow was sound. Inside the candle the wick proved to be in good condition, and after melting away part of the tallow he succeeded in getting it lighted.

"My oh, but I'm in clover!" cried Jimmy, as the blaze of the ancient candle flared up. "I wonder what's inside that door. It's something that's been locked up there for a hundred years. Shall I open it? No, no! It might hide something terrible. I must go on and on. I must find the way out of this dreadful place."

The timid boy shuddered. There was no telling what blood-curdling vision that iron door might conceal. He hurriedly pressed onward to the stairs, eager to escape from the dangers that environed him.

On down another flight of stairs he went, much longer than the preceding. Ten, twenty, thirty steps he counted, winding round and round, and seemingly leading far down into the depths of the earth.

He thanked his lucky star for the fortunate finding of the candle. He would not have dared to come this far in the dark.

At the point to which he had now come the stairway ceased. A long vaulted passage lay before him, leading straight off into the distance. It was so damp as to send a shiver through him. The walls were covered with a deep coating of mold. Thick layers of cobwebs draped the ceiling.

Taking courage from his candle, Jimmy pushed on into the stone-lined avenue. On and on, it seemed to him as if he was traveling for miles through the bowels of the earth. The passage led straight onward, without a bend in its whole extent.

As he went on, curiosity grew strong within him. What was hidden by that iron door? The thought kept persistently in his brain. And the opening he had felt with his groping hand. Was it a mere nook? Or was it a side-passage leading to some other of the secrets of that strange house? At every step the desire to explore these mysteries grew stronger within him. He could hardly keep himself from turning back.

"No, no, I must go on," he protested to himself. "I must go on to the end. Who knows what is before me yet?"

But what was that? Far in the distance he seemed to see a star. He ran hastily forward along that mysterious passage cut through the depths of the earth.

The star-like gleam grew stronger. Now a faint glimmer of daylight appeared to light up the further extremity of the pass. With the glad idea that he was nearing an outer aperture, he deposited his candle in a crevice of the floor, and hastened toward the light.

He had not far to go. It was indeed the glad daylight that penetrated, though but faintly, into that underground avenue. It came through narrow crevices, stealing its way dimly inward.

"He had, in fact, come to the end of the secret pass. The wall ceased here. In front of him the passage dwindled into a narrow hole, through which a man could only drag himself on hands and knees. It passed under a rock, and opened outwardly in a slender aperture that looked no bigger than a fox-hole, while its opening was shrouded with a thick growth of bushes, through which the daylight had trouble to make its way.

Jimmy, in an impulse of hope and joy, plunged hastily forward on hands and knees through the narrow pass, which had become half choked up by the dust of a century.

But when nearly through the aperture, his head indeed being in the outer bushes, he hastily checked himself. He had heard voices.

He listened eagerly. The voices were familiar. There were the soft tones of Mr. Norman, and the harsh sound of Plug Peters's hoarse voice. What did it mean?

He soon knew. All their words came distinctly to his ears. He learned that the passage was guarded at both extremities, and that any effort to escape would but throw him into the hands of his dire foes.

He also learned more: There was some secret understanding between Mr. Norman and the burglar in regard to himself.

He listened with redoubled eagerness. But the conversation was at an end. Mr. Norman had gone back, leaving Plug Peters on guard for the fugitive.

Jimmy drew himself cautiously back.

"He ain't going to nab me as easy as that," he muttered. "I'm safe while I stay here. After dark I might sneak out. He won't stay there all night."

He returned to where he had left his candle. It was his first idea to wait where he was until night, and then seek to escape. It could not be more than two or three hours off.

But the passage, even here, was damp and cold. And the thought that he had left some mysterious secrets unexplored came back to the young adventurer's mind. Without hesitation he took up the candle and began to retrace his steps. He could not spend the hours of waiting better than by exploring those old-time mysteries.

The knowledge he had now gained of the passage enabled him to proceed with more confidence. Five minutes brought him back to the triangular room, with its iron door.

Jimmy set down his candle and looked at this mysterious portal in wonder, doubt, and intense curiosity. What did it conceal? There was the key, inviting him to enter. But— He shook with superstitious fear.

Step by step he approached the door, drawn by some irresistible attraction. He listened intently, as if expecting to hear the sound of some living thing beyond it.

He touched the key cautiously. Then he ventured to grasp it more firmly. It was green with verdigris. After a minute's hesitation he fearfully attempted to turn it in the lock. It was not easy. The works of the lock were stiff with rust.

Jimmy pressed harder and harder as he gained more courage. Suddenly, with a grinding sound, the stubborn bolt gave way and shot back.

The timid explorer let go of the key and started away in trembling alarm. Yet nothing followed. All was deathly still.

His courage returning, he pushed on the door. It failed to yield. Then he grasped the iron handle and pulled. With a squeaking sound of the rusting hinges it slowly opened.

A gush of musty air came out, that nearly choked him.

He looked fearfully in, half-expecting to see some dread spectacle, some skeleton in chains, perhaps, or other frightful relic of old-time crimes. He remembered the groaning ghost. Did it indicate some dreadful deed, whose traces were hidden behind this mysterious door?

Yet his startled eyes beheld nothing frightful. There was nothing before him only a slender apartment, about six feet in length by two in breadth, and which, at first sight, seemed entirely empty.

Jimmy, with growing valor, soon plucked up courage to enter it. He was sadly disappointed, in fact. He had hoped for some strange and striking adventure, and here was nothing but an empty hole in the wall.

"It's queer, anyhow," he said. "The man who was last here was in such a hurry that he dropped his candle. What was his business? He left nothing. Then he must have taken something. Maybe he let out some poor prisoner, who had been locked up here for years."

At this moment the explorer gave a violent start. He had seen something at last. Before his eyes was a niche in the wall, and on it a brass-bound casket, of more than a foot long and six inches deep.

It was made of mahogany and clasped with brazen hoops, which time had covered thick with verdigris. A silver plate in front, black with time, still faintly showed the initial letters, D. R. N., deeply engraved.

The discoverer stood looking at his find, his brain full of hope and wonder.

He stood for several minutes, hesitating, before he ventured to touch the casket.

There was no key in it. He tried to lift it, but it was as heavy as if made of solid iron. Then he essayed to raise the lid, with fingers that trembled with expectation.

It failed to yield. It was locked.

Deeply disappointed, he tried again and again, using all his strength in the effort.

It gave slightly. There was a crackling sound, as if the time-worn lock was giving way. Then, as he pressed again, it flew up with a sharp crack, the lock dangling loose from the lid.

Jimmy started back and shut his eyes. He could not for the moment bear to look on the opened casket.

Then, with a sudden impulse, he flew to the other room, seized his candle, and as quickly returned.

A flash came to his eyes as the candlelight fell on the contents of the long-hidden casket.

It was full to the brim with yellow, round

bits of metal, gold coins of a century old. And on them lay coiled a necklace and bracelets of glittering stones that half blinded him with their luster.

He knew not that these were diamonds of the purest water. But the value of the gold he recognized, and drew back with such sudden delight that the candle fell from his nerveless hand.

In an instant he was plunged in utter darkness, the precious vision snatched from his eager eyes, while there came over him a trembling apprehension that all this had been but a dream.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TREASURE AND THE GHOST.

JIMMY, quivering with wonder, quickly stooped and picked up the fallen candle. He was feeling in his pocket for a match to light it, and again reveal the wonderful treasure, when he heard something that sent his blood curdling through his veins.

It was the hollow groan of the ghost. It came to his ears not loud, as before, but low, dull and muffled. It seemed miles away, yet, at the same time, it appeared to rise from the treasure-casket. With a wild impulse of terror he rushed blindly away. By chance he reached the door in the darkness, and clanged it to behind him, turning the key hastily in the lock, as if he hoped thus to confine the specter.

He clung to the key, shaking with affright. He could feel his hair standing on end. A tenfold treasure would not at that moment have induced him to venture back into that frightful room.

He looked fearfully over his shoulder in the darkness, as if in dread that the ghost might seize and carry him bodily off. The situation was too dreadful to bear. He hastily struck a match, and sought to light the candle. Ah, it was gone! It had dropped from his fingers in the flight, and was now locked within that fatal room.

What was to be done? He dared not return. For his life he would not have ventured again to open that door. Yet darkness would be on him again as soon as the match burned out, and horror seemed lurking in every nook and corner, ready to seize on him as soon as his protecting light vanished.

The scared boy hurried across the floor, and began hastily to climb the stairs which led to the secret door. He was half inclined to break out into the octagon room. Foxy Grimes was not as terrible to face as that blood-curdling groan.

Yet as he continued to ascend the stairs, with his rapidly failing match, there opened before his eyes the aperture which he had felt on his descent. He saw now that it was not a mere alcove, but a passage like that he had already traversed, running off at an upward slant through the thick wall of the building.

His match went out after revealing this much, and left him again in total darkness. He had but two or three left, but the gloom was more than he could bear, and he hastily struck another.

The impulse of curiosity was beginning to overcome his superstitious terror. Where did this new avenue lead? Was there some other door of escape? With little time for thought he stepped into the narrow passage, just wide enough to let him easily through, and hurried forward, eager to explore it ere his match should burn out.

It went straight forward, but at an upward slant. It ended, however, ere he had gone more than six feet. Before him was an oaken door, closed with a spring, like that which led to the octagon room.

He examined it closely. It had a handle which connected with the spring. It could be readily opened.

With the hasty impulse to escape, no matter where, he laid his fingers on the door handle. But as he did so there came again to his ears that frightful groan, so near now that it seemed almost to touch him.

He dropped the match, which had burned down to his fingers, and crouched to the floor. There was no use to fly. The specter was everywhere. The little fellow gained courage out of his very despair.

As he thus crouched in terror, a voice came to his ears, its tones as deep and hollow as the groan which had preceded it. It came from beyond that door at whose foot he now cowered.

"Twelve years! Twelve long, long years! Oh! shall I never leave this living tomb? Twelve years buried alive! Ah! the cruel, cruel villain! Is there no revenge? no redress? no escape? Must I die here and be forgotten? May God have pity on my miserable fate! Ah!"

His last exclamation came in a deep, hollow moan, like the sound which the listener had heard before.

It ceased to frighten him now. It must be a living man, not a ghost, that had given vent to that startling sound. A poor prisoner bemoaning his fate. With the thought Jimmy's courage returned. All his superstitious terror fled. It was life, not death, which was betokened by that melancholy voice.

He rose to his feet. A faint glimmer of light had caught his eye. It came through a narrow crevice near the upper extremity of the door. He had to stand on tip-toe to get his eye to the slender cavity.

With ardent curiosity he looked through the opening, which was not much larger than a pin-hole in dimensions. He caught a narrow glimpse of a dimly-lighted room, of no great width, for the opposite wall seemed very close at hand.

Directly under his eyes was a table, of which he could only see the center. But on it lay open a great book, on whose pages fell the light of a lamp.

But what riveted the attention of the observer was a hand that lay on the open page of the book. This was all he saw of the occupant of the mysterious room. It was a strange hand. Long, slender, chalk white, deeply wrinkled. At first sight it seemed cut in marble, but a slight movement showed that it was a thing of life. The boy's heart beat high with wonder.

A movement of the strange prisoner brought a portion of his face into the line of view. The observer gazed eagerly upon it. Was it a living man, or a specter? He saw a long beard, of snowy whiteness, that hung down below the table's rim. Hair of the same hue dropped over the shoulders. The face, with its long, thin nose, and hollow, gleaming eyes, was bleached until it seemed empty of blood. There was something awful in the expression of the countenance, and Jimmy dropped hastily down from his post of observation, in half-belief that he had gazed upon a spectral face.

But as he did so another thought came to him. There was something familiar in that face. He had seen it somewhere before. Ah! he had it now. It was the face of the portrait of the octagon room, the strange countenance which had so deeply arrested his attention, and in which he had recognized some distant likeness to himself.

The boy was no fool. He had wit enough to see that there was some deep crime hidden under his mysterious discovery. He seated himself at the foot of the secret door, and ran over in his mind the strange events through which he had recently passed.

Twelve years a prisoner in that hidden room; so the mysterious voice had said. Kept prisoner by whom? Who but Mr. Norman. And why? That the young critic could not guess. But he remembered the ghostly report that kept all prying eyes and ears from that room. He remembered seeing Mr. Norman carry a basket in that direction. The captive must have food. Was there not some other secret opening from the octagon room, through which he had been forced into that dungeon, and through which food was introduced to him? All these questions passed through the brain of the youthful pioneer, as he sat there deeply thinking.

But he was shrewd enough to perceive some other thing. If Mr. Norman knew the entrance to the secret prison, he could not know that to the hidden stairway, or he himself would have been pursued. And the door beside which he sat must be unknown to the prisoner, or he would long since have escaped.

"It's not too late. It's not too late," said Jimmy to himself. "Poor old man! Twelve years in that dreadful room! I'll open the door and let him out. And then I'll run, for I'm horribly afraid of him."

He looked again through his little peep-hole. There was the old captive still, leaning over his book, the abundant white hair straggling down over a face that was almost as white.

"Ah!" he murmured. "I have read every word in this volume fifty times over. And yet I ever return to it, for it is my only solace in my captivity."

Jimmy hesitated no longer. He seized the handle of the door. A pull displaced the spring. The secret portal, which had been closed for a century or more, came open to his touch.

It had opened, indeed, more suddenly than he had intended. Ere he hardly knew it the door was wide open, and he stood in the aperture, with the light of the lamp full on his form.

At the sound the old man lifted his face from

the book, and gazed before him with startled eyes.

A sharp cry, of alarm, wonder, and amazement, burst from his lips, as he saw the walls of his prison open, and that youthful figure filling the cavity.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he staggered back with uplifted hands, "what magical marvel do my sad eyes behold! Is it the work of fairies? Is that an angel form, before whose touch my dungeon walls fly asunder?"

"It is no fairy," cried Jimmy. "I'm only a boy. But I've come to set you free."

But the old man continued to retreat, as if beside himself with wonder.

"Ah! that voice! that face! Can it be—? It is! It is!"

The prisoner ran wildly forward. But his strength seemed to give way when he reached the table. He fell into his chair, with his face buried in his book.

A minute or two passed ere he could recover sufficiently to look up. He had begun to fancy that it was all a wild vision, a day-dream of his tortured brain.

He looked. He rubbed his hands across his eyes, and looked again. The boyish form had vanished! But the opening remained!

Quickly the released captive hurried forward, in fear lest this aperture should close, and shut him again into his long-closed dungeon.

But no. It remained open.

It was no magic aperture, but an actual door, which had been so skillfully hidden on his side that in his twelve years' imprisonment he had never discovered or suspected it.

Five minutes' examination showed him the whole secret of its working. On the inside it was lined with thin slabs of stone, which appeared continuous with the stone walls of the dungeon. It was worked by a spring, which he readily discovered now that he knew where to look for it.

But the youthful form that had opened his way to liberty? The face which had called from him that ardent cry of recognition? Was it a mortal form? Was it not rather some angel sent from heaven to give the prisoner release?

These thoughts ran through the old man's brain as he threw the white counterpane of the bed round his thinly-clad limbs, seized the lamp, and ventured into the unknown passage which lay revealed before him.

What had become of Jimmy?

He had fled in a moment of panic. The strange movements of the old man, his odd exclamations, his remarkable appearance as he tottered forward, were too much for the lad's courage. The old idea that this was a specter came back to him, and he ran hastily away into the darkness of the passage.

He dared not return. Suppose he should come face to face with this white-faced vision in some of those narrow passages? Was it indeed a thing of flesh and blood?

He did not care to test this thought, but hurried away in the dark to the stairs, and down them to the room below. Here he ran to the iron door and grasped the key, which he quickly turned in the lock. He had no fear now of the inside of the treasure-room. The ghost was outside.

Entering the narrow apartment he struck one of his remaining matches, and lit the candle, which he easily found, where he had dropped it on his former visit.

Then he inserted the key in the lock, and quickly turned it. He preferred to lock himself in with his treasure rather than to remain outside with that alarming figure.

But, was the treasure really there? Had it not all been a dream of his bewildered brain? He hurried in shivering alarm to see.

No. There was the casket. The gleam of those shining stones dazzled his eyes. The disks of yellow gold lay heaped before his vision. To his bewildered fancy there seemed an enormous treasure before him. He plunged his hand deep into the shining gold. The cool contact helped to allay the fever of his hotly pulsing blood. He stood there for many minutes with his hands buried deep in the rich treasure.

As he stood there, something else caught his eye. It was the corner of a slip of paper, which had been buried under the gold, but which he had disturbed and brought into view.

He took it out carefully, removing the covering coins so as not to tear it. It proved to be a narrow, folded slip of paper, brown with age. On opening it, the creases cracked asunder. He saw that it had been written on, but the ink had almost faded out, and was barely visible.

Jimmy would have given some of his treasure to be able to read it, but he had never been

taught to read. The mystic lines were so many hieroglyphics to him.

Suddenly there came a rattle of the iron door. He trembled and let fall the mystic document. The noise quickly ceased, however, and he could hear faint footsteps. Was it the old man of the dungeon seeking entrance? He was glad that he had locked himself in.

A half hour passed, and then the faint footsteps came again. They passed, and he heard them no more. Deep silence followed. The close air of the treasure room grew oppressive. It must be night now. It was time to escape.

The treasure-finder took one last look at his golden wealth. Would it vanish on his leaving that room? To make sure, he put two of the coins in his pocket, and also secured the written paper, which might reveal the mystery of this treasure trove.

Then closing the casket, he left the room, locking the door behind him and removing the key. He wanted no one else to enter that room until he should return. The gold was his, by the right of discovery.

The young fugitive had no idea of what had taken place in the last hour. The old man of the dungeon had been busy. He had explored the passage thoroughly, and emerged from it at both extremities. At one end he had scared Foxy Grimes and secured his stolen papers. At the other he had set Plug Peters to flight. He was now back in his prison-room, and preparing to examine the papers he had secured.

Ignorant of all this, Jimmy made his way down the steps and along the passage to its outer extremity.

It was dark now. The faint moonlight failed to enter. The candle, which had done him such good service, was burned down to its end. It would last but a few minutes more.

But he was done with it. He set it down on the floor of the passage, and crawled out through the narrow aperture.

It was a sort of thicket into which he emerged. But he soon gained open ground.

It was night. The moon shone brightly in the sky. There was no sign of his enemy. With a glad heart he hurried forward, up the sloping hillside.

He had nearly reached its summit when there came a rushing sound above, and the form of a man sprung into view. With deep terror he recognized the brutal face of Plug Peters. Uttering a hoarse cry of triumph the burglar leaped forward and grasped the fugitive by the arm. As he gazed fearfully into that fierce face the timid lad felt the blood freezing in his veins. In a moment more he fell in a senseless heap at the feet of his dreaded foe.

CHAPTER X.

JIMMY BACK IN THE WOLVES' DEN.

"GLAD ter see ye ag'in, Jimmy. How's his nibs, hey? How's his jolly nibs?"

These words come from Joe the Joker. With his hat resting on his right ear, and his hair bristling in its usual fashion on his head, he plunged both hands deep in his pockets as he stood before the timid boy, with a look of insolent triumph on his face.

Jimmy sat crouched on a chair in Foxy Grimes's headquarters, looking utterly miserable and despondent. After all his efforts to escape to an honest life here he was back again in the power of the thieves.

Billy Blake came swaggering up, his fat sides shaking with laughter.

"Didn't feed you on pork and beans where you was, Jimmy?" he queried, poking the victim in the side. "You're sorter fell away, and blue in the gills. Oh, lawsee, but ain't it a jolly go?"

He pressed his two hands to his sides, as if he could hardly contain himself, and gave a loud cock-crow, followed by a shrieking burst of laughter.

"Don't he look like a pickled mackerel? Jist squint at the Kid, Joe. Oh, my eyes."

"Git out, you bloody, fat fool!" answered the Joker, with spleen. "Let the boy alone, can't yer? Looks now as if he'd jist buried his grandmammy. Tried to run away, did you, you bloomin' young sprout?"

Jimmy made no answer to all these gibes. He had drawn his feet to the rounds of his chair, and sat with his elbows on his knees, and his face between his hands, looking the picture of misery.

"Wonder if he's made a stake," suggested Billy. "Let's 'vestigate his kit."

"That's the most sensible thing you've said to-day," answered the Joker.

He caught the victim by the shoulders, and lifted him from the chair.

"Go through his riggin', Billy."

"Let me alone!" exclaimed Jimmy, roused from his depression.

He struggled in the hands of his tormentors, but they were too much for him. In less than a minute Billy's skillful fingers had gone through every pocket of the boy's clothes.

"What's this?" he cried. "If it ain't gold I'm a monkey? Two bits, Joker. Jist 'nough fur a divide. That's all, 'cept a scaly old key and a bit o' torn paper."

He flung the latter from him disdainfully to the opposite corner of the room.

Jimmy squirmed in the hands that held him, with a cry of fury. The indignity to which he had been subjected had filled him with passionate anger, and before the Joker could guard against it he bent suddenly down, and bit spitefully into his hand.

"The deuce take the dog-goned young tarrier!" yelled the youthful reprobate, as he hastily dropped his captive. "He's bit me, dang his pichter! Let's pull his teeth, Billy."

He grasped the lad again, who fought hard to escape from his hands.

"Hey! What's all this?" cried Foxy, who had at that moment entered the room. "What are you at with the poor little fellow?"

"Jist gittin' his fightin' weight, that's all," answered the Joker, as he released his victim. "You mought think we was goin' to cabbage his snout, the way he's squeakin'."

"I'll bu'st yours if you go on tormenting him," rejoined Foxy angrily. "Come here, my dear. They're a pair of idle young rascals. Come to the old man. They sha'n't trouble you no more, buess your eyes."

He caught Jimmy by the arm, and drew him between his knees, as he sunk into a chair. The lad reluctantly yielded. He kept his eyes fixed jealously on the key.

"Poor little toady, it's a shame, so it is." He fondled the boy as he spoke, passing his bony fingers sleekly over his clothing.

Billy winked at the Joker, and silly slipped him one of the gold coins, while his fat sides shook with suppressed mirth.

"Look at the old buffer," he whispered. "He's playin' the wise clip on the Kid."

"Don't I see? He's 'vestigatin' his pockets. Lucky we had the fu'st go."

The old thief looked disappointed. His sly fingers had slipped into every one of Jimmy's pockets, without reward.

"There, my dear, now don't you get so skeered," he said soothingly. "Nobody ain't going to do nothing to you. I'm going to keep you here like a king, and feed you up like a nabob, and nobody sha'n't hurt you."

"You won't ask me to do nothing that ain't honest?" demanded Jimmy timidly.

"Ask you to do anything as ain't honest? The idea! Whatever put such ridiculous stuff in your head?"

"Then won't you let me go? I don't like it here, and don't want to stay."

"Let you go? Oh, yes! After a while. Not just now. Want to get acquainted with you first, my dear."

The Joker was shaking his fist at Jimmy over the old fence's shoulder. He was afraid he might mention the loss of his gold-pieces. But the boy was shrewd enough to know that he would never see them again, and kept quiet for reasons of his own.

"There now," spoke the Old Fox, in his oiliest tones, "you be a good little boy, and see if Mr. Grimes don't take care of you."

He released the lad, who shrunk instinctively from his touch. Jimmy sidled away. He had the paper and the key in his mind, but did not wish to let them know that he set any store by them.

He strolled carelessly about for five minutes before he reached them. Then he threw himself with seeming carelessness on the floor. Waiting until the attention of the others was turned elsewhere, he quietly slipped the regained treasures into his pocket.

"I don't care for the gold-pieces," he said to himself. "I know where there's plenty more. But I'm going to hold on to that key. And I'm bound to get somebody to read that paper."

The two young thieves, with sly winks, had slipped from the room. Their golden prize was beginning to burn in their pockets. Foxy was still there, gliding about in a noiseless way, that was enough to set an honest man's teeth on edge. The weary lad curled himself up in his corner and went fast asleep. The old fence grinned as he looked at him.

"There's money in him," he muttered. "Fool that I was to lose those papers. But Norman shall bleed. I'll make him bleed. He

shall not cheat me out of my just dues, for all his ghosts."

He started violently. The door had quietly opened, and Mr. Norman stood before him.

"Norman shall bleed, eh?" he said, quietly. "I'm very glad to hear it. Only it's never wise to think out loud, my good fellow."

"Ha! what brings you here? Do you know where you are?"

"Perfectly well. I'm in a place where it wouldn't be safe to carry much money in my pocket. So I took care not to do so— Ah! he's there, and asleep!" He stood looking down with a strange gaze on the unconscious boy. "If he only should not wake again."

"Do you want him to sleep on?"

Foxy had glided to his elbow. His voice was full of devilish meaning, as he put his yellow eyes on his visitor's face.

Mr. Norman started, with an impulse of fear.

"No, no!" he hastily answered. "But—if anything should happen—if a funeral should take place from this house—I—I might be willing to pay the funeral expenses—even if they were very heavy."

Foxy looked around him with a strange expression. He glided to the door and looked into the outer hall. Then he returned.

"You would want it quietly done?" he whispered.

"Yes," came the answer, in a shuddering voice. "The boy looks thin. He may be going into a decline. I have brought you some medicine for him, Mr. Grimes." He handed a bottle containing a greenish liquid to the old fence, looking significantly into his face. "The directions are on it. But—it is only for the sick. Be careful that no one else tastes it."

"Is it a quick cure?" asked the old villain, with a doubtful look.

"Slow. It will leave no marks of its work."

"And how much— Hush, there is a step outside."

He quickly hid the fatal vial in some deep pocket of his long, threadbare coat. Mr. Norman's face was deathly pale. He trembled like a leaf as he bent over the sleeping boy.

"Wait. I'll see who it is," cried Foxy, who was too old a bird to let such an affair disturb him. "Get back your color, sir. You're like a ghost."

He shambled hastily toward the door. But ere he could reach it the new-comer entered, and displayed the hard features and brutal expression of Plug Peters.

A look of suspicion came into his face, as he recognized the visitor, who still had his back toward him.

"What the junket's bu'sted loose now?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper, of Old Grimes.

"What's he here arter?"

"Only paying a visit to the Kid," answered Foxy, coolly.

"That cow won't jump. Can't shove no sich 'tater gravy down my throat. You're collogin' somethin', you two."

"We're to make a burglar's kid of the boy, and get him into the jug soon as possible," answered Foxy, with a cunning wink. "He'll bleed, if the job's done neat."

"Reckon so," answered Plug, shortly, as he strode forward. "Jist squint round this way, Mr. Norman. 'Tain't no new phiz ye're axed to 'vestigate."

"Ha! Peters! It's you, then?" said Mr. Norman, quickly turning. He had regained his color.

"'Bout that way, I calkerlate. Dunno anybody I wanted ter see wuss nor you. So you want us to make a buzzer outer the Kid that's snoozin' thar?"

"A buzzer?"

"Jist so. A thief, if you like it better. Say the word. I'm the chapter break him in."

"Yes, yes. That's what I want. Hush! Isn't he awake?"

"Nary time. He's sleepin' like a top."

"Understand," said Mr. Norman, in a tremulous whisper, "he must be kept out of my way. The prison door must hold him close. But can you do it? He seems to hate your ways."

"Do it? I reckon. Jist you plank down the swag, and I'll make a royal bloke outer the Kid. What's to be the heft of the plunder?"

A long conversation succeeded between the three villainous confederates over the sleeping boy, whose future they were coolly disposing of.

But the previous dark arrangement between Foxy and Mr. Norman was not revealed to the burglar. The object of the present conversation was to throw him off the scent. Two were enough to plan a murder.

"The boy cannot be made a thief of," said Mr. Norman to himself. "We must take surer measures."

We must pass over several days succeeding this conference. An odd change had come over the relations between Foxy Grimes and his young guest, that excited the wonder of the older boys. Jimmy was allowed the free range of the house. There was no apparent hindrance to his movements. The old rogue, indeed, had grown strangely kind. His tone to the boy was soft and mild. He even prepared special articles of food for him, which he insisted on his eating, to the great dissatisfaction of the other boys, who were not allowed to taste of them.

"If ther's anything thinner than this, I'd like some chap to p'int it out ter me," declared the Joker. "What er yer coddlin' up ther Kid fur, hey? Goin' to make a gen'lman o' him, blast his figure-head?"

"Fattening him up ter kill, I reckon," rejoined Billy. "Jist like a young porker."

"Blow your trumpets somewhere else," answered Foxy decisively. "Jimmy's weak and broke down. He wants to be built up. I'll feed him on pound-cake, and you two on brickbats, if I choose. So put that in your pipe and smoke it. Don't mind their chatter, my dear."

"I won't," answered Jimmy, a little triumphant that he had got the best of his tormentors. "And I am feeling bad, Mr. Grimes. I'm feeling very queer inside."

"I know you are, my poor little boy. I've seen the doctor about you. But it won't be long. He says you'll soon be strong again."

If the doctor had really said so, he certainly did not tell the truth. Jimmy got worse instead of better. His head felt at times as if it would burst. He grew feeble and feverish, and wandered about the house in a weakly way as if hardly fit to be out of bed.

He had a plan laid out in his head to escape, and to seek again the secret passage with its ghostly inhabitant, and its concealed treasure.

But now he felt unable for the exertion. He grew weaker and weaker, indeed, until one morning he was quite unable to rise from his bed. His throbbing head seemed glued to the pillow.

Old Grimes hovered around him with a great show of feeling and sympathy. He attended to his every want with a seeming kindness that quite took the poor lad's heart. He prepared all his food with his own hands, provided him medicine and cooling drinks, and did everything but call in the doctor. He was a little afraid to have the eyes of a doctor on his patient.

"There, my poor boy, now I hope you're comfortable," he crooned over his victim. "Keep right still now, and the old man will get you something nice."

"You will, hey?"

These words were in the harsh tones of Plug Peters, who stood in the doorway, looking suspiciously at the tableau.

"Don't talk so rough, the poor boy's nervous," cried Foxy, hustling his unwelcome visitor from the room.

"Well, I'll be sizzled if somethin' ain't goin' to bu'st," growled Plug. "Never see'd nobody so kind to a poor little boy afore. Kind of a turnover. See here, you durned old bloke, ther's a jig loose yere."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Not much, I reckon. But the devil's loose in you. 'Tain't nateral. Ye're dosin' that Kid, blast yer eyes! Ye're poisonin' him, if you like that word better!"

The old rogue threw up both hands in holy horror, while a look of deep concern came on his face.

"The idea of that!" he said. "And at my age! I didn't expect that from you, Plug Peters."

CHAPTER XI.

THE OLD CAPTIVE AND JOE THE JOKER.

WITHIN the secret chamber, in the walls of the octagon room, sat the white-haired prisoner. But a strange change had come over him during the last few days. The look of despair had left his face, and was replaced by a warm expression of hope. It seemed as if a new life had come to him, after his years of living death.

Before him were spread several papers, which he had been diligently perusing. He leaned back in his chair with a look of triumph.

"It seems the work of magic," he muttered. "After my long, long years of misery to have the doors of my prison suddenly thrown open, and the path of liberty revealed. That youthful form, which appeared and vanished before my eyes! Was it a messenger from Heaven, sent

to open my prison doors? It was the face of my dearly loved son, who died years ago, as my cruel jailer has told me. Is he dead indeed, or was it a living form? No, no, it was an image of the dead. I searched the secret passage through and through, but it held nothing living. It was the spectral form of my boy, sent to set me free from my long bondage."

He rubbed his forehead uneasily, and pushed back the long hair that drooped over his eyes. As he did so, his vision fell on the papers before him.

"Ah!" he cried, "I have my revenge here. My enemy has kept the record of all his villainy in these documents, which fell into my hands by such a strange chance. That person whom I found reading them, had he stolen them? Perhaps so. How I scared him! He thought me a ghost, no doubt. I look enough like one to readily take that character."

He rose, folded the papers, and placed them securely in his pocket. He was now dressed in a suit of faded gray, of an antique fashion.

"It is time to be at work, if I am to have my revenge," he muttered.

On one side of his prison was a sort of window, inclosed with firm iron bars. It was through this that he had for years received food from his heartless keeper. From above there came a dim light, through a corner of the skylight, which was extended over that room. It was of ground glass, so that no one could look through it into the secret chamber.

The rest of the chamber seemed a continuous stone wall, except that it had two very narrow crevices to admit the outer air.

But the old man had learned a useful lesson from Jimmy's visit. He advanced to the wall at one point, and pressed hard on a slight projection that appeared about a foot above his head.

Instantly, with a click of the spring, the secret door flew open.

Before him was the narrow passage in the stone wall. He hastened forward. He knew it well now. He had traversed it many times in the days since its discovery.

"There is but one secret remaining," he muttered. "If I could but open that iron door, and find what it conceals. Who of my ancestors locked it, and what has he hidden there? That I must soon discover."

He had now left the passage by the secret door, and entered the octagon room. He moved cautiously forward through the house, intently listening. Suddenly he stopped. He had heard voices. One of them was that of his deadly enemy, William Norman. He advanced again with the utmost caution.

The voices came from a room whose door stood slightly open. He crept close up and listened to the conversation that was proceeding within.

"Are you sure?" came the voice of Mr. Norman. "Is it working truly?"

The answer came in a low, oily, unpleasant voice, that seemed full of hypocritical villainy.

"The Kid's on his last legs. He won't kick two days longer."

"And have you enough of—the medicine?" There was a tremor and a significance in these words that made the blood of the listener run cold.

"Yes," came the answer.

"And what brought you here? These visits may raise suspicion."

"I will tell you." The speaker lowered his voice. "Plug Peters has smelled a rat." The listener started on hearing this name. "He swears I am poisoning the Kid. He must be silenced, or our game is at an end."

"Ah! that is dangerous. What is to be done? How shall he be silenced?"

"By money. I can buy him. If the boy is once dead and buried we can laugh at him, for he has no proof. This drug leaves no mark, you say?"

"None. It is safe."

"Then our work is sure. I need a thousand dollars to-day. Nothing less will do. Ha! what is that? I thought I heard something."

He hurried to the door and looked suspiciously out. No one was visible. The listener had vanished.

An hour or two afterward Foxy Grimes, for it was he who had been engaged in the conversation with Mr. Norman, entered a car on the Elevated Road on his return. He failed to perceive a strange looking old man, with remarkably long hair and beard, who had followed him to the platform, and entered another car on the same train.

As the train rolled swiftly toward the heart of the city this hoary passenger took from his pocket the parcel of papers which had so luckily

come into his hands. One of these he selected and opened.

"I thought so," he said to himself. "Plug Peters is the name of the man who carried off my child, and agreed that he should never be seen again in the East. From what that old man said he must be in collusion with this villain. Am I in the way of unfolding the whole dark mystery which has shrouded me and mine? I must find this man. My boy may still live. Perchance it was no specter, but a living being, that opened the doors of my prison. Who is the boy that these heartless villains are poisoning? Is it my son? I fear so. But I will save him. Thank Heaven I am warned of their design."

At nine o'clock that same evening, Joe, the Joker, had just left the house of the old fence, and was rolling along in a reckless way, a pipe in his mouth, his hat on one side of his head, and both hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"Like ter salt some swag to-night," he said. "Old Foxy keeps me on too short rations, dang his hide! If I lift some plunder, I'll keep it, now you bet. Guess I'm gittin' old enough to have my wages riz."

A volley of curses came from his lips as he took the pipe from his mouth.

"Blast the old coon, he's up to some gum game with Jimmy the Kid. Can't shut my optics, shoot him. And Plug's in it, too. I'm despr'at' afeard little Jimmy's goin' to kick the bucket. I see'd Old Grimes with a bottle of green stuff in his claws. It's not as I'm goin' to weep for the blasted young poor-houser, but I want them ter know that the Joker ain't no fool, and he's goin' to fork his sheer of the plunder."

"Bring me that bottle of green stuff, and it will be a ten-dollar bill in your pocket."

The Joker started violently on hearing these words, which were spoken almost in his ear. He swung round on his heel, and gave a yet more violent start on catching sight, in the gloom, of a chalk-white face and hair.

"Shiver my optics, what sort of a banshee is this?" he muttered, backing off in a fright.

"Don't be frightened," continued the voice. "I'm not a ghost, though I may look like one. Will you do it? Bring me the bottle, and the money is yours."

"I daresn't," answered the Joker, doubtfully. "Foxy Grimes ain't no baby. 'S'pose he misses the bottle? He'll swear I tuk it; he allers does. And I tell you I'm afeard on him when he gits riled."

"Exchange the bottle, then. I will get you another vial of green liquid."

"All square. I'll do that."

"Wait here." The speaker hurried away.

"Well, if he isn't a rum un!" remarked the astonished boy. "I'll sw'ar if he didn't almost make me turn a somerset inside. Never got sich a set-back in my mortal days, blast my eyes."

In ten minutes the strange old man was back.

"Here," he cried, pressing a bottle into the boy's hand. "Take this. Exchange the contents of the two bottles. Bring me the other. I will wait here till you return."

"That's too thin," declared the Joker, with a wink. "You plugged up out o' the ground, jist like a jack-in-a-box. 'S'pose you plug back ag'in. Where's I goin' to git my plunder?"

"Here. I'll pay you half, down."

"That's biz," answered the boy, as he pocketed the coin. "I'll be back in a twinkling."

Fifteen minutes afterward he returned.

"Thar yit, old milky? Yere's yer bottle. Old Foxy had it hid, but bless yer eyes, I've been smellin' round, 'cause I didn't think all was on the square. Got it nailed anyhow, so fork over the swag."

The old man did so, and received the bottle with a strong show of gratification.

"See here, my boy," he said. "Would you like to earn some more of those golden coins?"

"Would I like ter? Oh no! Nary time. Couldn't do it on no 'count. If you shoved 'em under my nose I'd tell yer to git out."

"I'll give you as much every night if you'll meet me here at this hour, and tell me what has gone on in that house during the day."

"What! Play traitor? Sell the crib?"

"About the boy, I mean."

"Oh, only 'bout the Kid. I'm yer hoss on that. Kinder like little Jimmy arter all."

"What is he like? Can you describe him?"

Joe did so, as well as he could with his limited language. The listener felt a cold sweat breaking out on his brow as he heard the description.

"It is he," he murmured. "It must be he. It was flesh and blood I saw, and no specter. To-morrow then, at this hour."

He turned, and vanished in the darkness.

The Joker stood looking after him, with his hands thrust into his pockets, his legs wide open, and his hat flung far back on his head.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned!" were all the words that came from his lips.

He caught at his falling hat, thrust it firmly down on his head, and walked away, more astonished then he had ever been in his life before.

A half hour afterward the white-faced stranger entered a chemist's establishment on the Bowery.

"Will you analyze the contents of this vial?" he said to the clerk who approached him. "Let me know just what it contains, and what its effect would be on the human system. I will be here to-morrow night for your answer."

The clerk took the bottle, held it up to the light, shook its contents, and then looked with a smile at his customer.

"I can tell you now," he answered.

"You can?"

"Yes, as I am of the opinion that I put up that article myself. At least I think so. There has been a change of bottles, has there not?"

"Yes."

"Could I see the original? I cannot be sure without the label."

"I will get you a copy of it. But what answer? Is that stuff dangerous?"

"That depends on the dose. Ten drops might cure. Twenty drops would be slow death to whoever continued to take it."

"That will do, sir. I may call on you to repeat that. I will obtain the original vial."

We must pass rapidly over the events of the few succeeding days. Joe the Joker was true to his engagement. He met the old stranger every evening at the appointed spot, and detailed the day's events.

"Old Foxy's in a stew," he said on one of these meetings. "The Kid's gittin' better, and he don't know what ter make on't." The Joker stuck his tongue significantly in his cheek. "He keeps dosin' him with the green stuff, but 'tain't workin' worth a cent. It's the funniest lark I ever see'd in my born days."

Two nights afterward he met his employer with another story.

"Old Grimes is lookin' bluer'n ever," he said. "He's jist dumfuddled. But that ain't the wust. I've a notion he's goin' ter change the med'cine. He's been out to-day, and he come back with another bottle. I see'd it, the old coon. It's kinder white this time."

The old man looked startled.

"Has he given him any of it yet?"

"I rayther reckon not."

"Can you lay hold of it?"

"'Tain't in the wood, old duffer. He keeps it 'bout him, I calkerlate. Been smellin' round, but I'm dished on that biz."

The old man stood in deep thought for several minutes, absently twining his long beard round his hand. His youthful confederate stood looking in his face with a sort of awe that was a new feeling to him.

"See here, my boy," said the stranger at length. "You must take me into that house. You must lead me to the bedroom of the sick boy."

The Joker shook his head.

"'Tain't to be did."

"It must be," cried the old man, vehemently. "Foxy'll salt me, if he finds I'm playin' it on him."

"Don't fear. I will not betray you. It can be done secretly."

Joe stood gnawing his lip doubtfully.

"What'll it be worth?" he at length asked.

"I will double your fee."

"Can't see it. Make it thirty and I mought venture."

"It is a bargain."

"All square, boss. Wait till I smell out the ground."

He was gone about ten minutes, during which his employer waited impatiently. At the end of that time he returned, with a look of confidence.

"Forge ahead, quick!" he cried. "The coast's clear."

He led on, followed by the strange old man, who seemed intensely excited.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DOINGS OF THE GHOST.

A STRANGE scene was taking place in the bedroom of Jimmy Snipe, the sick boy. Over him bent the white face of the strange old man, with an emotion which he did not seek to conceal.

"It is he, my boy, my own son!" he cried eagerly. "I need no proof. His face is enough."

It is my son, whom I have mourned as dead for long years past. Ah! I can be happy again."

He caught the boy in his arms, and pressed him warmly to his breast.

This wakened the sleeping invalid, who gave a cry of alarm on seeing that strange face so near his own.

"Oh, it is the old man of the secret room!" he cried. "It is the ghost! Let me go! I will never do it again!"

Suddenly roused from his sleep he fancied himself yet in the hidden passage, and in the power of the specter.

"I am no ghost, my poor boy," said the old man soothingly. "I am your father. Twelve years I lay in that dreadful prison, till your dear hand set me free."

"Twelve years? Yes. I heard you say so before," murmured the invalid. "My father? Can it be my own father?"

"It is in your face, my boy. You were but two years old when I was thrust into that horrible prison by my cruel cousin. He drugged me into insensibility, and when I came to my senses again I was there. He told me my boy was dead, and that I should never leave that place alive. But Heaven sent you there, my child, to open my prison door."

"Oh, and I never knew I had a father!" cried the poor boy, flinging his arms around his parent's neck. "They told me in the almshouse that I never had a father. I felt so strange when I first saw you in that room. And I am so happy now."

At this moment the door flew open, and Joe the Joker came hastily in.

"The jig's up," he cried excitedly. "Old Grimes is come back. You've got to slide, old fuffer. He'll kick up thunder'n lightning if he twigs you here."

The Joker seemed in a dreadful flurry, as if he stood in mortal fear of the old fence.

"There! He's pillin' up the wooden hill now. Slide in here, and keep mum."

He opened the door of a deep closet in the room, and thrust the old man hastily in.

"You keep sly now, Jimmy, or I'll bu'st yer ugly figure-head. I'll catch rats if Foxy finds I've been connivin'."

He slipped from the room, and was off like a shot.

In a minute afterward the stealthy, gliding step of Old Grimes sounded in the passage without. He opened the door and entered the sick chamber. Jimmy lay back quiet, trying to obey the orders of the Joker, though his heart beat wildly.

"How does he feel now, my dear?" asked the old villain, in his most soothing tone, as he sidled up to the bed, and looked down on the sick boy with affected kindness in his yellow eyes. "He's better, poor little toad! Ain't he better?"

"Yes," answered Jimmy, faintly. "Ever so much better, Mr. Grimes."

"That's nice. That's very nice." He softly smoothed the bed-clothes. "There's something wrong about that confounded drug," he muttered uneasily to himself. "Has it been meddled with? I must destroy what is left of it, and try the other."

"Will I be up soon, Mr. Grimes?" asked Jimmy anxiously.

"Yes, my dear. You're ever so much better. I've got some new medicine for you, deary. The old man's all the time thinking about his little boy that's laying here sick."

As he spoke he drew a bottle from his breast pocket, and carefully poured into a spoon a small portion of a whitish liquid.

"Now, Jimmy. Drink this what your old daddy Grimes has brought you."

He lifted the boy's head, and held the dangerous dose to his lips, while a lurid light gleamed in his yellow eyes.

"Hold, you murderous villain!"

These words came in a loud, thrilling voice. Grimes hastily turned and looked across the room. Then the medicine fell with a crash to the floor, while a yell of terror broke from his lips.

"The ghost! The ghost!" he screamed in wild affright, as he rushed wildly for the door.

He had good reason. There stood the figure with the long white beard and hair, and the awfully pallid face, which had startled him once before in the ancient mansion.

One look was enough for Foxy Grimes. He felt as if a second look at that awful face and figure would strike him dead. Out of the open door he plunged, mad with terror. His gasping cries could be heard far along the corridors of the old house.

"What the blazes is bu'sted?" cried the Joker, rushing in. "Has old Foxy tuk p'isun?"

"He think's I'm a ghost."

"Oh, laws!" the Joker roared with laughter. "Well, if that ain't the richest go out! Blame my thunderin' optics, but it's a perfect snoozer of a go!"

With little attention to the roaring laugh of the young thief, the old man hurried across to the bedside.

"You must leave here, my son. I am afraid to trust you in that murderer's reach. I can carry you to the street. There we may easily find a conveyance."

He seized the bottle of medicine which Grimes had let fall in his fright, and thrust it into his pocket.

"It may be useful as evidence," he muttered. Then hastily wrapping the bed-clothing around the invalid boy he snatched him up in his arms.

"No, no!" cried Jimmy, in alarm. "I want my clothes."

"I will get you better ones, my son."

"I want my own!" cried Jimmy. "You don't know. They're worth more than all the clothes in the city. I won't go without them."

A cry of impatience broke from the old man's lips at this perverse fancy.

"Oh, guv the Kid his toggery!" cried the Joker. "Here they is." He flung the scanty attire into the folds of the bed-clothing. "Now you'd best sparkle. If Plug Peters drops round this way you'll get yerself in the nastiest pickle you ever seed."

The excited father took this advice, and hurried to the door with the sick boy in his arms.

As the fugitive reached the street, the Joker ran ahead of him.

"This way, old boss," he cried. "There's a kerridge at the next corner."

Gladly following, for his burden was growing heavy for his weak arms, the old man quickly found himself at a carriage-stand. In a few moments more he was rolling rapidly through the streets of New York, while his guide thrust a last golden gift into his ready pocket.

"Dunno as I ought ter let him fluke away with the Kid," he muttered. "It's the best pay-in' bit o' work I ever struck, but I'm 'feard the job's salted. Anyhow, I've got some shiners as old Foxy can't freeze on, and I'm goin' to have an-out-an-outer to-night, sure pop. Guess I'll slide down to Delmonico's."

We must run hastily over what succeeded. It was not until the next day that Foxy discovered the escape of his young invalid. No money would have induced him to venture back to that room except by daylight.

He trembled violently on entering, and looked fearfully across the room, as if expecting to still behold that white-faced specter.

But his fear was changed to a spasm of rage, on seeing that the boy had vanished, and with him the tell-tale bottle.

"Who has done this?" he cried, in a rage. "This is your work, Joker! If it is, by my wicked soul—"

"Hadt' nothin' ter do with it," broke in the Joker, hastily. "Guess how it were the ghost as tugged off the Kid."

"Hello! What's bu'sted now?" demanded Plug Peters, who had just entered. "Whar's the Kid?" He looked suspiciously from one to the other.

"Vamosed. Cut stick," explained the Joker. "Foxy's been-diddled right up to his eyes."

"Ha! How's this? Gone? By the tarnal blue blazes, I'll make somebody squeal if you've let him slide! Wake up, you old idiot, or I'll shake you outside yer hide!"

He grasped Foxy by the shoulder and shook him violently, while his dark face grew purple with rage.

"It was the ghost," cried Foxy, in alarm. "Don't get r'iled, Plug. Give Mr. Peters a pipe, Billy. Squat down and I'll tell you all about it."

At about the same hour as this scene was taking place a very different one was occurring at the hiding-place of the two fugitives.

They were now in the secret room of the old mansion, which had served so long as a prison for the old man. The excitement of the preceding night had given new life to the boy, who was sitting up with the color of health in his cheeks.

A long conversation had taken place between the two. Jimmy had told all he could remember of his early life, and the old man was fully satisfied that he had regained his long-lost son.

The boy followed with a recital of his later adventures, and particularly that concerned with his finding of the secret passage.

"I know the whole story of that avenue," said the old man. "This part of the house was built by an ancestor of mine, Dallas R. Norman. It was the time of the troubles with Eng-

land, before the Revolution. There was no telling what dangers might arise, or what hiding-places, or avenues of escape, might be needed. It was in preparation for this that these rooms and passages were built in the walls."

"And were they ever needed?" asked Jimmy, earnestly.

"There is a tradition in the family which says so. It is rumored that Dallas Norman hid a treasure in some secret place to save it from the marauding soldiers. But if so it has never been found. The secret of the passage died with him. The entrance to this room was remembered, but you were the first to recover the lost mystery of the hidden passage."

"If there were a treasure, if it were found, who would it belong to?" asked Jimmy.

"To you, my son, as the direct heir of the house, after my death. All that is mine becomes yours."

"You don't know why I made you bring my clothes away?" asked Jimmy, still smiling.

"No. I think I can easily improve on that ragged suit."

"Guess not. It's worth more than you think. I've got something here I want you to read, father. I don't know what's in it, for I've never learned to read."

He produced the bit of time-browned paper.

The old gentleman curiously unfoled it.

With some difficulty he read the ancient document, while his face worked with strange emotions.

"What does it mean? I cannot understand where you got this," he eagerly declared.

"Read it out. I want to hear it."

The old man read, with excited voice, the contents of the paper, as follows:

"JUNE 10th, 1778.

"I have just learned that I have been accused to the British commander of rebel sympathies. He has ordered a search of my house, and my arrest. I place this here out of the reach of the enemy. I will make my escape to the American lines. If I should fail to return hither, the contents of this casket are left to the first of my family who shall enter its hiding-place and discover its contained treasure. In my will a diagram of the secret entrances will be found. DALLAS R. NORMAN."

"The treasure! What treasure? Where?" asked the old man. "Have you discovered a treasure? Dallas Norman left no will. He was killed in battle, and the estate descended to his son. From that day to this the secret of the passage has been lost. Where did you obtain this strange document?"

"I will show you," answered the boy, proudly. "Bring the lamp, father."

Jimmy seemed strong again as he led onward into the secret avenue. His father followed in strong excitement to the chamber of the iron door.

"That's another thing I wanted my clothes for," declared Jimmy. "I didn't care to lose this key."

He had opened the door as he spoke. He advanced to the alcove that held the brass-bound casket.

"Bring the lamp here, father."

The lid was thrown back. The light of the lamp flashed on the treasure within. The old man started back, holding up his hands in glad astonishment.

"Gold!" he cried. "And diamonds!" He snatched up the glittering necklace. "Why, this is worth a fortune! And you found it? You?"

"Yes. And that paper in it."

"Then it is yours by the terms of the paper. I don't need to leave you any money, my boy. You are richer than me already."

He caught the glad boy in his arms as he spoke, and fairly danced in his fatherly delight.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TRAPPERS TRAPPED.

TROUBLE was growing thick around William Norman, the heartless occupant of the Norman estate. Twelve years before he had taken advantage of the trusting disposition of his cousin, Gilbert Norman, the owner of the estate. While the latter was buried in grief for the loss of his wife, his infant son had disappeared, through abduction. The child had really been carried off by Plug Peters, who was engaged by William Norman to desert the infant somewhere in the West, where its identity would be lost.

Utterly overcome by these troubles, Gilbert Norman had made over his estate in trust to his cousin, and told all his friends that he intended to search for his son from end to end of the country, if he spent a lifetime in the task.

He disappeared from New York, and had never since been heard of. In fact, it was believed that Gilbert had died somewhere in the

West, and as William was his heir in default of his son, he was not disturbed in his possession.

Such was the state of affairs at the date of our story. No one dreamed that the missing man lay all that time in a secret dungeon in his own mansion. No one dreamed that his villainous cousin had taken advantage of the opportunity to drug his trusting relative, and to place him while insensible in the secret chamber.

The groaning lamentations of the unfortunate man had soon given the octagon room the reputation of being haunted, and from that time there was no danger of its secret being discovered, as no one for his life would have ventured near it. William Norman's crime seemed safe.

Yet, on the day after the rescue of Jimmy Snipe from the headquarters of the thieves, the villainous tenant of the ancient mansion was in serious trouble.

It will be remembered that, on the first visit of Foxy Grimes, he had hastily returned to a secret drawer of his cabinet some papers he had been examining. Unfortunately for him he had neglected to quite close this drawer, and Foxy had taken the opportunity to empty it of its papers, and to close the drawer so as to conceal the evidence of his theft. With the subsequent fate of those papers we are well acquainted.

But of all this William Norman was utterly ignorant. He had not opened the secret drawer since. This morning, however, he had done so. To his complete surprise and dismay the drawer was empty.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, in a thrilling whisper, "what does this mean? Those papers! Those papers! Fool that I was to keep them! I am lost if they fall into any unsafe hands! Fool! Fool!" He struck his forehead violently with his clinched fist.

"I looked at them last the day I was visited by those two thieves. One of those men has them. I must buy them back. I must have them at any price!"

He remembered that Foxy Grimes had been left alone in the room. It must be he who had the papers. They could be bought from him. All was not lost yet. The troubled villain had not missed his prisoner from the secret room, and did not dream of all that had been going on there. In that respect he felt confident still.

"That contract with Plug Peters to dispose of the child. That forged letter from the West to Gilbert, which made him determine to go in search of his son. Those are the most dangerous papers. Why did I keep them? Fool that I was to fancy that a secret drawer was security enough."

He stopped, and fell into a listening attitude. There were steps outside. The next moment a servant opened the door and announced, "Mr. Merkel and Mr. Peters."

A quick spasm of mingled hope and fear ran through the villain's frame.

"Show them up here," he commanded, in a tone that made the man stare.

In a minute more there were ushered into the room. Foxy Grimes, alias Mr. Merkel, and Plug Peters.

Mr. Norman looked in nervous excitement at his visitors.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" asked Mr. Norman, with an affected air of surprise and displeasure.

"The greatest misfortune," began Foxy, in a husky voice. "The boy—little Jimmy—"

"Dry up. Ye're skeered outer yer boots," broke in Plug. "The Kid's vamoused, that's what. Dead stole away. That's what ye've got fur goin' back on me, and givin' yer job ter this old slyboots."

Mr. Norman sprang up and seized Foxy violently by the arm.

"Gone? Stolen? Explain yourself. By Heaven, if you are trying to trick me—"

"He's gone. Carried off by the ghost." The old fellow shuddered violently, as if the specter was still before his eyes.

"The ghost? What do you mean, you old idiot?"

"It was the old man with long white hair and beard, and with the dreadful eyes. It was the same that appeared to me the night I was on watch in the house, and that took the papers from me."

Old Foxy trembled as he spoke, and glared furtively around him. He had evidently received a terrible fright. Mr. Norman stood staring at him in dismay.

"An old man! White hair and beard! Papers! What papers? Ha! you infernal thief! They were my papers! You stole them from this cabinet! Confess, or I'll throttle you!"

He rushed madly forward and clutched Foxy

by the throat. The old villain had some trouble to escape from the fierce clutch.

"It was a handful of papers I picked up here," he admitted. "I don't know what they were. On my life I don't. I was just going to read them, in the room where you left me on guard, when the ghost appeared. Such a dreadful sight! I can see it yet!" He pressed his hands on his eyes as if to shut out the horror. "When I looked back the specter was gone, and the papers had vanished."

"An old man with white hair and beard?" cried Mr. Norman with renewed alarm. "Can it be? Good heavens, if it is he, if he has escaped, all is lost! Stay! Wait till I return!"

He dashed from the room in a storm of rage and terror. His confederates stood looking at one another in dismay and wonder.

Scarce five minutes elapsed ere Mr. Norman was back again. His face was full of renewed hope.

"We are safe yet," he cried. "He is there, and the boy with him."

"Who is there?" asked Foxy.

"And whar the blazes is he?" demanded Plug, with a look of amazement.

"I will tell you. Your ghost is a man of flesh and blood, like ourselves. He has managed to escape from the prison in which I held him.

When the boy escaped to the secret passage he must have found a way to release my prisoner. But he has been fool enough to return, and bring the boy with him. The game is mine now, with your help. I tell you this because I need your aid. It will be well worth your while to help me. They must not escape alive. Can I depend on your aid?"

"Yes. But what's to be done?"

"We must guard the ends of the secret passage as before. Here is a pistol for each of you. If your ghost appears again, don't run, but shoot. Do you understand? Neither of them must escape alive. What say you?"

"I'm your man. He's got my bottle of medicine."

"And I'm yer boss," broke in Plug. "And if I don't bleed you lively arterwards it's a caution," he repeated to himself.

"Then we must be quick, while our rats are in the cage. They are out of reach, but they shall starve if they keep hidden. That's the easiest and surest way. Quick, ere it's too late."

In ten minutes afterward the two villains were on guard again—Plug in the solitary ravine, and Foxy in the octagon room. Since learning the truth all his dread of the ghost had disappeared, and a savage desire for revenge on the man who had frightened and cheated him took its place.

William Norman rubbed his hands with murderous satisfaction.

"At last! At last!" he muttered. "They cannot escape me now. Father and son must perish, and the estate will be safely mine."

That day and night passed, yet no sign of the fugitives appeared. It seemed as if they were afraid to venture from their hiding-place. None of the confederates had slept during the night. It was no time to sleep.

"To-day will do the work," said Norman to his outdoor guard. "They will certainly seek to break out to-day. Be ready."

"Ay, ay," growled Plug, crouching behind the bush which he had selected as his lookout place. "I'm not goin' to take water. I ain't that sort."

Five minutes afterward he saw a man slowly picking his way down the ravine. It was the first person who had shown himself in that secluded spot. He stooped lower to avoid discovery. In doing so he caught sight of two more men, who were standing in the upper edge of the hollow, looking down. The villain flung himself on the ground with a sense of fear. What brought all these men here? Things began to look squally for the plot.

To his alarm he found they were approaching him. He attempted to crawl into the bushes, and hide there until they should pass. It was too late.

"Hold up there, my hearty," came an imperious voice. "We are out on a fox-hunt this fine morning, and I guess we'll take your brush."

The discovered villain turned his head, his hand savagely clutching his pistol.

To his utter surprise and consternation, he found three revolvers aimed at his head, while the men were so placed as to completely surround him.

"You can fling up the sponge, Plug Peters," continued the speaker. "Your game's dished, and you needn't watch that hole any longer."

"What the blazes are you squallin' bout?" asked the burglar, savagely.

"Dry up now. Put up your hands for the bracelets. Here's the star, if it will do your eyes good." He opened his coat, and revealed a policeman's star.

Plug slyly flung his pistol into the bush. He saw the game was up. He rose slowly to his feet, and held out his wrists for the handcuffs.

"I'll make yer sweat fur this," he growled.

"All right, my cove. Toddle on."

To his surprise he was taken to the house, and conducted to Mr. Norman's study. One glance was enough for his shrewd brain. The room was occupied by a half-dozen stern-faced men, in whose midst sat Foxy Grimes and William Norman, both in handcuffs. Somehow or other the deep-laid scheme had been discovered, and the conspirators trapped.

As yet none of them knew the cause of their arrest. They sat looking at one another in dismay. Mr. Norman, with assumed haughtiness, demanded the reason of this outrage, and threatened dire vengeance on the police.

"Here's the man to answer you," rejoined one of the officers, as he stood aside from the entrance.

There appeared in the doorway a white-haired man, holding a boy by the hand.

Mr. Norman, with a shudder of uncontrollable terror, covered his eyes with his hands. For the moment he fancied that his victims had perished, and were come from the land of the dead to hunt their murderer.

"Look on me," cried the old man, with stern dignity. "It is I, Gilbert Norman, the victim of your villainy. And this is my son, Henry Norman, escaped from your murderous schemes. You fancied we were safely shut in that prison chamber, and that you held us at your mercy. Villain, you should have made sure. When I saw your face at the wicket yesterday I read your game in your eyes. I hastened to escape, and left an empty cage for you to watch. Do you know now how you have been trapped? The tables are now turned, and justice, which you have so long defied, has you in its hands at last."

These words had an astonishing effect. A deep moan came from the discovered villain. He swayed uneasily on his chair, while his face grew pallid, and his eyes seemed starting from his head. Then he fell forward like a dead log, and was only saved by the hands of the officers from plunging headlong to the floor.

After his twelve years of successful crime he had been unmasked at last. No wonder his senses fled from him at that dreadful moment.

It was a thrilling situation, of which nothing more need be said. The trio of villains had been caught in their own trap, and it but remained for the law to give them the just reward of their crimes.

We may hasten over the subsequent history of our characters. William Norman was tried and convicted for his crime, and was sentenced to twelve years in the penitentiary, the exact period he had held his victim in prison.

Foxy Grimes received the same sentence, for his effort to poison his friendless *protege*, and his other criminal acts. Plug Peters was sent up for six years, his offense being deemed less serious.

And through the aid of the almshouse authorities, the identity of Jimmy Snipe with the stolen child was fully proven. Gilbert Norman's assurance that Jimmy was his lost son was then confirmed.

As for the rest of our characters, an effort was made by the new tenant of the Norman estate to induce the Joker and his companion in vice to live an honest life. They were placed in good situations, where they made the best of promises.

But their youthful lessons had sunk too deep to be eradicated. They ended their effort at honesty by robbing their employers, and are both now inmates of the State's Prison.

Henry Norman, the old Jimmy Snipe, is now a young man of splendid promise, and the possessor of a large private fortune, the product of the treasure-casket found in the secret room. He is happy in the society of his father, who looks on him as the apple of his eye. The worn-out prisoner would not be known to-day, in the hale old man, with the snow-white hair, whom no one would mistake for a ghost.

As for the secret chambers and passages, they no longer exist. Gilbert Norman viewed them with such horror, that he has had the octagon wing torn down to the ground, and a modern edifice built upon its site. This contains the favorite rooms of his son, Henry Norman, who cherishes the spot as the fertile field of his fortunes, and is not likely to soon forget his adventures there as Jimmy, the Kid.

THE END.

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